

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY ANTHOLOGY

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SUMMER
1975

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VOLUME 29

69
2 SHORT
NOVELS

9 SHORT
STORIES

ED McBAIN
CHARLOTTE
ARMSTRONG

1 NOVEL

EARL DERR BIGGERS

2 NOVELETS

MICHAEL GILBERT
LAWRENCE G.
BLOCHMAN

Ellery Queen
Robert L. Fish
Edward D. Hoch
Berkely Mather
Helen McCloy
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the WHO's WHO of WHODUNITS

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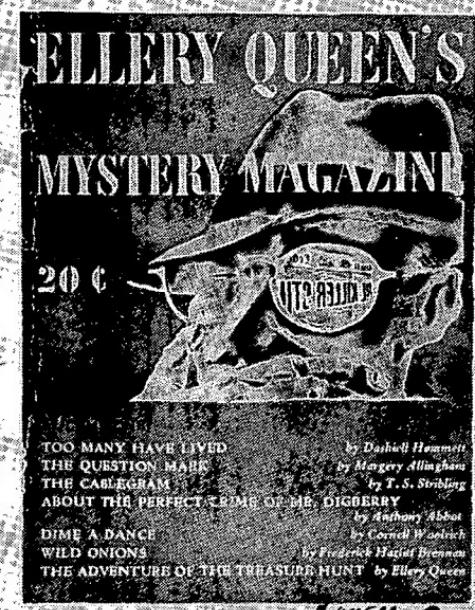


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ELLERY QUEEN'S ANTHOLOGY

SPRING -
SUMMER
1975

EDITED BY

"Ellery Queen"
"

DAVIS PUBLICATIONS, INC., 229 PARK AVE. SOUTH
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader:

At various times we have referred to three major trends in the detective-crime story. In the first, which was born in 1841 (fathered by Edgar Allan Poe) and is now commonly called the Whodunit, primary emphasis was placed on the identity of the criminal—or more grammatically phrased, *Who did it?*

The second trend began in 1894 with the "medical mystery" (L. T. Meade and Dr. Clifford Halifax), escalated to the scientific detective story (R. Austin Freeman), and became the Howdunit, with emphasis on modus operandi—that is, *How* was the crime committed?

The third trend was seeded by psychology in 1910 (William MacHarg and Edwin Balmer), turned psychiatric in 1929 (Harvey J. O'Higgins), and blossomed into a fully developed technique in the 1930's—from the Whodunit and Howdunit to the Whydunit, with emphasis on criminal motivation—that is, *Why* was the crime committed?

Now, how would this third stage of development be viewed and expressed by a serious critic? We discovered one answer in a review column by the perceptive Anatole Broyard, as it appeared in "The New York Times" of August 1, 1973. Mr. Broyard wrote: "Good mystery writers have always known that man himself is the greatest mystery of all, more baffling than the most labyrinthine plot. And so they are gradually shifting the emphasis from 'Who killed X' to 'Who was X, and what did he do that drove someone to the desperate and improbable expedient of killing him?' Well asked!

There, in a nutshell, is the Who-How-Why of the detective-crime story, and the W-H-W of *EQMM*'s series of semiannual anthologies of which this is Volume 29. You will find the mysterious Who, the puzzling How, and the secret Why in stories about such famous detectives as

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and when the Who mystifies you and the How perplexes you and the Why challenges and still eludes you, can pure reading pleasure be far behind?

As in the 28 earlier anthologies of this series we have selected only those stories that meet the standards of *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*, so dedicatedly maintained these past 34 years—top quality or top professionalism of writing, and superior originality or superior craftsmanship in plotting. And none of the stories in this book—1 novel, 2 short novels, 2 novelets, and 9 short stories—has ever appeared in the 70 anthologies previously edited by

ELLERY QUEEN

Charlotte Armstrong

The Second Commandment

We challenge you on three counts:

- One: To stop reading this story once you have started it.*
- Two: To think of a more unusual story in the mystery field.*
- Three: To name another mystery story that deals with a so-called "taboo theme" as honestly and inoffensively as the late Charlotte Armstrong did in this story—or with less so-called "sensationalism" than Charlotte Armstrong used in handling a "delicate" subject.*

A short novel, complete in this issue . . .

Halley was sure glad the damn fog had rolled up and was bilowing off over the mountains. Hey, if you looked southwest, you could even see a couple of stars. Lucky. They might have to hang around, maybe till morning.

And it was a little too quiet out here. Not much traffic on California Route 1; on a night like this there had better not be. The sea kept boooming; it always did. The men shouted once in a while at their work, but they knew their business. They'd have her up on the road, and pretty quick.

Hey, here's my chance, thought Halley, to get all the stuff down, like they keep telling me. So the young Sheriff's Deputy opened the back door of his official car and leaned over to let the dome light fall on his paper work. The husband was sitting inside, and quiet.

"May I please have your name again, sir?" Halley used the polite official drone.

"Hugh Macroy." The other's voice, even in exhaustion, had a timbre and a promise of richness. A singer, maybe? Young Halley's ear had caught this possibility when he had first answered the call. He never had seen the man—at least, not too well. Now the lighting was weird—red lights flashing on the equipment, for instance.

"Address?" Halley asked, after he had checked the spelling.

"382 Scott—no, I'm sorry. 1501 South Columbo."

"That's in Santa Carla, sir? Right out of L.A.?"

"Yes." The man was holding his head at the temples, between thumb and two middle fingers. Poor old guy, he didn't hardly remember where he lived. But Halley, who knew better than to indulge in emotions of his own over one of these routine tragedies, figured himself lucky the fellow wasn't cracking up.

"Your age, sir?"

"Forty-five."

(Check. Kind of an old-looking guy.) "Occupation?"

"I am the Pastor at St. Andrew's."

Halley became a little more respectful, if possible, because—well, hell, you were supposed to be. "Just you and your wife in the car, right, sir? En route from Carmel, didn't you say, sir? To Santa Carla?"

"We had expected to stay the night in San Luis Obispo."

"I see, sir. Your wife's name, please?"

"Sarah. Sarah Bright."

Halley wrote down *Sara*. "Her age, please?"

"Fifty-five."

(Huh!) "Housewife, sir, would you say?"

"I suppose so." The man was very calm—too beat, probably, thought Halley, to be anything else. Although Halley had heard some who carried on and cried and sometimes words kept coming out of them like a damn broken faucet.

"And how long you been married?" the Deputy Sheriff continued politely.

"I think it has been two days, if today is Wednesday." Now, in the syllables, the voice keened softly.

"Any chil—" (Oh, oh!) "Excuse me, sir."

"There is Sarah's daughter, in San Luis Obispo. Mrs. Geoffrey Minter. She should be told about this, as soon as may be. She will have been worrying."

"Yes, sir," said Halley, reacting a little crisply not only to the tone but the grammar. "If you've got her address or phone, I can get her notified, right now."

The man dictated an address and a phone number as if he were reading them from a list he could see. Halley could tell that his attention had gone away from what he was saying. He was awfully quiet.

Halley thanked him and called in from the front seat. "Okay.

They'll call her, sir. We probably won't be here too long now," he told the silent figure and drew himself away and shut the car doors gently.

He strolled on strong legs to the brink. He could hear the heavy water slamming into rock forty feet below. (Always did.) The night sky was clearing all the way overhead now. There was even a pale moon.

Some honeymoon, thought Halley. But he wasn't going to say anything. It had occurred to him that this one might not be routine, not exactly, and that Halley had better watch his step, and be, at all times, absolutely correct.

"How's it going?" he inquired cheerfully of the toilers.

They had a strong light playing on her as she came up in the basket. She was dead, all right.

Macroy got out of the car and looked down at her and maybe he prayed or something. Halley didn't wait too long before he touched the clergyman's arm.

"They'll take her now, sir. If you'll just come with me?"

The man turned obediently. Halley put him into the back seat of the official car and got in to drive.

As the Deputy steered skillfully onto the pavement Macroy said, "You are very kind. I don't think I could drive—not just now." His voice sounded shaky and coming over shaky teeth, but it was still singsongy.

"That's all right, sir," said Halley. But he thought, Don't he know his car's got to stay put and get checked out, for gossakes? That kind of voice—Halley didn't exactly trust it. Sounded old-timey to him. Or some kind of phony.

On the highway, that narrow stretch along the curving cliffs, Halley scooted along steadily and safely toward the place where this man must go. By the book. And that was how Halley was going, you bet—by the book. It might not be a routine case at all.

So forget the sight of Sarah Bright Macroy, aged fifty-five, in her final stillness. And how she'd looked as if she had about four chins, where the crepey skin fell off her jawbone. And thick in the waist, but with those puny legs some old biddies get, sticking out like sticks, with knots in them, and her shoes gone so that the feet turned outward like a couple of fins, all gnarled and bunioned. Um boy, some honeymoon! Halley couldn't figure it.

So swiftly, decisively, youthfully, Halley drove the official car, watching the guy from the back of his head, in case he got excited or anything. But he didn't. He just sat there, quiet, stunned.

Sheriff's Captain Horace Burns was a sharp-nosed man of forty-seven and there was a universal opinion (which included his own) that you had to get up early in the morning to fool him. His office had seen about as much wear as he had, but Burns kept it in stern order, and it was a place where people behaved themselves.

Burns had felt satisfied with Halley, who sat up straight on the hard chair by the door, with his young face poker-smooth. His report had been clear and concise. His mien was proper. The Captain's attention was on this preacher. He saw a good-looking man, about his own age, lean and well set up, his face aquiline but rugged enough not to be "pretty." He also saw the pallor on the skin, the glaze of shock in the dark eyes—which, of course, were to be expected.

Macroy, as invited, was telling the story in his own words, and the Captain, listening, didn't fiddle with anything. His hands were at rest. He listened like a cat.

"So we left Carmel early this afternoon," Macroy was saying. "We had driven up on 101. We thought we'd come down along the ocean, having no idea that the fog was going to roll in the way it did."

Behind him a clerk was taking it down. Macroy didn't seem to be aware of that.

"But it did," said that voice, and woe was in it. "As thick a fog as I have ever experienced. We had passed Big Sur. You can't, you know, get through the mountains and change routes."

"You're stuck with it," the Captain said agreeably.

"Yes. Well, it was very slow going and very tiring. We were so much delayed that the sun went down, although you could hardly tell."

"You stopped," Burns prodded, thinking that the voice sounded like a preacher's, all right. "About what time?"

"I don't know. There was a sudden rift and I was able to see the wide place to our right. On the ocean side. A scenic point, I imagine." The Captain nodded. "Well, it looked possible to take the car off the highway there, so I—so I did. I had been so tense for such a long time that I was very glad to stop driving. Then,

Sarah wished to get out of the car, and I—”

“Why?”

“Beg pardon?”

“Why did she wish to get out of the car?” The Captain used the official drone. When the minister didn’t answer, Burns said, “It has to be included in your statement.”

“Yes,” said Macroy. He glanced at the clerk. “She needed to—”

When he got stuck, Halley’s face was careful not to ripple.

“Answer a call of nature,” droned the Captain. “Has to be on record. That’s right, Reverend?”

Macroy said with sober sadness, “Yes. I took the flashlight and got out to make sure there was enough margin between us and the edge.” He stared over the Captain’s head, seeing visions. “The light didn’t accomplish much,” he went on, “except to create a kind of blank white wall, about three feet before me. But I could check the ground. So I helped her out. I gave her the light and cautioned her. She promised not to go too far. I, of course, got back into my seat—”

He hesitated.

The Captain said, “Car lights on, were they?”

“Yes.”

“She went around behind the car?”

“Yes.”

“Go on. Full details, please. You’re doing fine.”

“I was comforting my right shoulder with a little massage,” said the minister with a touch of bitterness, “when I thought I heard her cry out.”

“Motor off, was it?” The Captain’s calm insistence held him.

“Yes. It was very quiet. Except for the surf. When I heard, or thought I heard . . . I listened, but there was no other cry. In a short while I called to her. There was no answer. I couldn’t . . . couldn’t, of course, see anything. I called again. And again. Finally, I got out.”

“And what did you do?” said the Captain, and again his droning voice held the man.

“The flashlight,” he said, “was there.”

“On, was it? The light on, I mean?”

“Yes.” Macroy seemed to wait for and rely on these questions. “It was lying on the ground, pointing to sea. I picked it up. I began to call and range the whole—the whole—well, it is a sort of platform, you might say, a sort of triangular plateau. I shuffled

over all of it—between the pavement and the brink—and she wasn't . . .”

“Take your time,” said the Captain.

But the minister lifted his head and spoke more rapidly. “At last, and I don't know when, a car came along. Mercifully it stopped. The driver offered me a ride. But I couldn't leave her.” The anguished music was back in the voice. “How could I leave her?”

“He didn't get out? The driver of the car?” said Burns, again coming to the rescue.

“No. No. I begged him to send some help. Then I just kept on ranging and calling and—hoping and waiting, until help came.” Macroy sank back.

“He called in, all right,” Burns said in his flat tone. “Hung up without giving his name. But he can be found, I think, any time we need him.”

Macroy was staring at the Captain with total incomprehension. He said, “I would like to thank him—yes, I would like to some day.” Not now, wept his voice. Not yet.

“Can be arranged.” Burns leaned back. “Just a couple of questions, Mr. Macroy. Was it your wife's suggestion that you stop the car?”

“I beg your pardon?”

“Did she ask you to stop? Or was it your idea?”

“Oh, I'm sorry. I wasn't following. No, it was my—well, you see, I knew she was in distress. But it was I who saw the opportunity.”

“I see,” said the Captain. “And you got back in the car for reasons of—er—privacy?”

“Values,” said Macroy with sudden hollowness. “How ridiculous! In that dangerous spot. I knew how dangerous it was. I shouldn't have let her. I shouldn't.”

The Captain, had he been a cat, would have had his ears up, and his tail, curled, would have stirred lazily.

“I will always—” Macroy was as good as weeping now. “Always regret.” His eyes closed.

“You were only a few miles from low ground,” said the Captain calmly. “You didn't know that?”

Macroy had his face in his hands and he rocked his whole body in the negative.

The Captain, when his continued listening was obviously

proving unprofitable, said for the record, "You didn't know. Well, sir, I guess that's about all, for now."

"Where have they brought her?" Macroy dropped his hands.

"I—er—wouldn't go over to the funeral parlor. No point. You realize there's got to be an autopsy?" Macroy said nothing. "Now, we aren't holding you, but you're a lot of miles from home. So I think what you'd better do, Reverend, is go over to the motel and rest there for the night. We'll need your signature on your statement, for one thing. In the morning will do."

"Thank you," said Macroy. "Yes. I couldn't leave."

"Did you push your wife?" said the Captain conversationally.

Macroy's face could be no paler. "No," he said with wondering restraint. "I told you."

"The motel," said the Captain in exactly the same conversational manner, "is almost straight across the highway, a little to your left."

Macroy ducked his head in farewell, said nothing, and walked to the door. Halley jumped up and politely opened it for him.

"Halley." Burns was mild but Halley turned quickly and let the door close itself behind the minister.

"Yes, sir."

"This one is going to splash," said Burns glumly. "So watch yourself."

"Yes, sir. Did he do it, sir?" My Master will know, of course, Halley's face said.

"Whether he did or not, we're going to be able to say we went looking for every damn crumb of evidence there ain't going to be." This was, however crossly said, a palsy-walsy kind of thing for Burns to be saying.

"You saw the woman, sir?" The Captain stared sourly but Halley went on. It bubbled out of him. "I can't help thinking—some honeymoon! I mean—"

The Captain grunted. "Yah, and *he's* a pretty good-looking Joe." (Halley thought he concealed his astonishment.) "Well, kiss the cow," said Burns with a warning glare. (Halley hadn't fooled him.) "And keep your little old baby face *shut*."

"Yes, sir."

"Thing of it is," said the Captain, less belligerently, "there was this opportunity. But if he did it, he don't *know* why. And he can't believe it, so he don't really know it at all. Don't think that can't happen."

Halley marveled respectfully.

"You get on over to the funeral parlor and when the daughter shows, bring her by."

Burns turned to instruct the clerk. Damn vultures, he thought. The damn press was out there. Well, *they* didn't have to go by the book; but they'd get precious little out of him.

Saul Zeigler, aged twenty-two, was standing with Carstairs in the hallway of the low building. Zeigler was a local, just out of college, working for peanuts, and green as grass. He deferred to the older man, who was semiretired these days, but still picked up occasional plums for the big L.A. paper. Carstairs, with his connections, had already been on the phone to Santa Carla. Zeigler was impressed.

When they saw a man come out of the Captain's office alone, Carstairs moved in before Zeigler could get his own wits going. The hall was a barren length, with institutional green walls, a worn linoleum floor, and three naked light bulbs strung in a line overhead. The tall thin man looked ghastly.

"Reverend Macroy?" Carstairs was saying. "Excuse me. Terrible tragedy. Could we talk a minute?" Carstairs did not wait for permission. "Your bride was Sarah Bright? That's right, isn't it, sir?"

"Yes."

"My name is Carstairs," said Carstairs, forcing the manly handshake. "I'm that necessary evil, the newspaperman. But it's always best to get the facts from the ones who were there. Better all around."

Smooth, thought Zeigler, as Carstairs kept boring in.

"Sarah Bright was the widow of Herman Bright? Bright Electronics?"

"Yes."

"A very successful enterprise, I understand."

"Yes, I— Yes."

"I understand you'd moved into her mansion on South Columbo?" Carstairs was chatty-sounding.

"Her house," said Macroy wearily.

"About how long had you two been courting, Reverend?" Carstairs became the old buddy.

Zeigler thought the drawn face winced, but the man said quietly, "We met about six months ago."

"She was an older woman?"

"Older than I," said Macroy. "If you would excuse me, please, I am not feeling up to an interview. I would like to get over to the motel now and be alone."

Carstairs brushed this off as if it had never been spoken. "Bright died four years ago, wasn't it? And your first wife died when?"

The minister put out one hand and braced himself on the wall. "Nine years ago," he said patiently.

"You and Sarah Bright got married Monday?"

"Yes. In the morning."

"And took off for a honeymoon trip?" Carstairs had shouldered around to face Macroy, who seemed driven closer to the wall.

"Yes, yes. May I please—" Macroy pleaded.

"I'm very sorry," said Carstairs, "I know this is a very bad time." But his feet in their battered alligator shoes didn't move. "If you could just run over what happened, just briefly? I certainly want to get it absolutely straight, absolutely correct."

"We left Carmel early this afternoon." The minister put his free palm over one eye. "I took the scenic route because I thought she would enjoy—"

"Bum choice this time of year, wasn't it?" said Carstairs in a genial way.

The minister took his hand down and moved until his shoulders touched the wall. He was blinking, as if there was something going on he could not understand. His silence was thunderous.

Zeigler found himself pushing in to say respectfully, "I understand, sir, that the whole coastline was closed in tight. Worst fog in years. Pretty bad, was it, sir?"

"Yes," said Macroy, but he was looking at the older man and a hostility had sprung up, as invisible but as unmistakable as a gust of wind. The dazed look was beginning to lift from the dark eyes, like mist being blown away.

Carstairs said blandly, "Now, you stopped, sir? Why was that?"

Macroy didn't answer.

"I'm trying to find out how this terrible thing could have happened," said Carstairs, all innocent patience. "Why you stopped, for instance? What I mean, there couldn't have been a whole lot of scenery to see, not in that fog and after dark." Now his innocence was cruel, and he was defensively hostile. Zeigler could feel it on his own skin.

Macroy said, "No." His voice had gone flat.

"Why did you get out of the car? Or, I should say, why did the lady get out? By herself, did she? Didn't have a little lovers' spat, I'm sure. Then why did she get out?"

Carstairs was bullying now, and young Zeigler discovered that he couldn't take it. So he tugged at the bigger man. "She hadda go, for gosh sake," he said deep in his skinny young throat, "and you know it, so why badger the poor guy? Lay off!"

"So okay," said Carstairs, in the same strangulated manner, "but you tell me how in hell she could have *fallen* off that damn cliff?"

"Maybe you don't understand women," said Zeigler fiercely.

Carstairs laughed. Then Zeigler saw the minister's face. He stood there, leaning against the wall, having made no move to escape. On his face there was such a look—of loathing and sorrow and bewilderment.

"People are always interested," said Carstairs cheerily, turning back on his prey. "Do you happen to know what Mrs. Bright—excuse me, Mrs. Macroy—was worth?"

Macroy shook his head slightly. His lips were drawn back. He looked like a death's-head. Abruptly he thrust himself from the wall. "Let me pass."

"Why certainly. Certainly." Carstairs played surprise that his courtesy could possibly be questioned. "Thank you very much, sir," he called after Macroy, who walked away from them. Then he said to Zeigler, "And how do you like them velvet tonsils? I'll bet he knows. The merry widow was worth millions, kiddo. So maybe she hadda go. Right?"

Zeigler didn't dare open his mouth.

Then, at the far end of the hall, the street doors burst open and a woman and two men entered. The woman came first, weeping violently, her head down, a handkerchief over her mouth.

Macroy saw her and said, "Eunice. I'm so sorry, my dear. So sorry." The music was back in his voice.

But the woman dropped the handkerchief and lifted red-rimmed furious eyes. She was about thirty, already thickening at the middle, no beauty at best, and now ugly in hysteria. "I don't want to talk to you," she shrieked, recoiling. "I never want to see you again. Ever!"

A dapper man with dark-rimmed eyeglasses put his arm around her. "Come now, Eunice. Hush up, sweetheart."

"All I know," the woman screamed, "is that my darling mother

was just fine until she had to marry *him*, and now she's all smashed up and dead and broken." She wailed and hit out at the air.

Captain Burns was there as if he had flown in. He didn't care for scenes. He and Halley took hold of the woman between them. But she cried out to her husband, "You tell him. He's *not* going to live in my mother's house and have all my mother's lovely things."

Burns said, "You'll come with me, now, Mrs. Minter." And she went.

But Geoffrey Minter lingered to say to Macroy in a high, cold, uninflected voice, "You'd better not try to talk to Eunice, not just now. She's very upset."

(The understatement of the year, thought Zeigler.)

Macroy said, "Geoffrey, believe me—"

But Geoffrey said, "By the way, Eunice wants *me* to take charge of the funeral. And I certainly hope you aren't going to raise any objections."

"No," said Macroy, staggering. "No. None at all." He walked away, curving erratically to brace himself against the wall at every few strides.

Zeigler said, "He's never going to make it across the damn road."

"So be his guide," said Carstairs. "You and your bleeding heart. But what you get you bring back to Papa. I'll cover the loved ones."

Young Zeigler went sailing after the minister. Carstairs was waylaying the son-in-law. Zeigler heard Minter's high voice saying, "I don't know the legal position. No new will has been drawn, not since the marriage. We'll find out." He, too, seemed furious, in his own tight way.

Zeigler took the Reverend Macroy's arm and began to lead him.

The arm he held was tense and deeply trembling and it accepted his hand only by default; but Zeigler got them safely across the highway and into the motel office. Zeigler explained to the woman there—"tragic accident"—"no luggage"—"Sheriff's Captain suggested."

The woman was awed and a little frightened. It was Zeigler who took the key. He knew the place. He guided Macroy into the inner court, found the numbered door, unlocked it, switched on a

light, glanced around at the lifeless luxury.

He didn't know whether he was now alone with a heartbroken bridegroom—or with a murderer. It was his job to find out, if he could. He said, "Looks all right, sir. Now, how about I call up and have somebody bring some hot coffee? Maybe a sandwich? Probably you ought to eat."

A funny thing was happening to Ziegler's voice. It was getting musical. Damn it, whichever this man was, he was suffering, or Ziegler was a monkey's uncle.

But the minister rejected music. "No, thank you. Nothing." He remained motionless, outside the room. There were hooded lights close to the ground along the flowered borders of this courtyard, and they sent shadows upward to patch that stony face with black. Ziegler looked where the man was looking—at three high scraggly palm tops, grotesque against the clearing sky; between them, and the stars some wispy remembrances of that deadly fog still scudded.

"Come in," coaxed Ziegler. "I'll be glad to stick around a little bit, if you'd like—"

"I'd rather be alone."

It was the time for Ziegler to insist solicitously. But he heard himself saying, "Okay, I don't blame you." As he turned away, Ziegler said to himself in disgust, and almost audibly, "But I'm one hell of a newspaperman."

Macroy said, "And I'm one hell of a clergyman."

He didn't seem to know that he had spoken. He was standing perfectly still, with his face turned up. His hands were clenched at his sides. Up there the palm fronds against that ambiguous sky were like a witch's hands, bent at the knuckles, with too many taloned fingers dripping down.

The moment had an eerie importance, as if this were some kind of rite. To placate the evil mist, now departing? Or rite of passage?

A goose walked over Ziegler's grave.

Then the Reverend Macroy went into the room and closed the door.

Carstairs pounced. "What? What?"

"Nah, not a word," said Ziegler, lying instinctively. "Shocked stupid. Poor guy."

"How stupid can you get, for more than a million bucks?" said

Carstairs. "Especially if you're untouchable."

"What? What?" said Zeigler immediately.

"I just got off the phone with his Bishop." Carstairs looked disgusted. "What'ya know? Your buddy is a Lamb of God or something and pure as the driven snow."

"What did he ever do to you?" asked Zeigler curiously.

"What did I do to him, for God's sake?" Carstairs' eyes looked hot. "So I don't live in the dark ages! I got to get back on the phone."

Zeigler wondered who was guilty of what. He honestly didn't know.

The Bishop, whose name was Roger Everard, came as soon as he could, which was at about ten o'clock the following morning. "I don't think it's wise, Hugh," he said soothingly, as he pulled up his trouser legs to sit down and gaze compassionately at this unshaven face, so drawn with suffering. "I don't think you should make any such decision, and certainly not so precipitously. It is not wise at this time."

"But I *cannot*—" said Macroy.

"Surely you understand," said Everard, who often had a brisk executive way of speaking, "that these people are only doing what is their obligation, according to law. Nobody seriously imagines, my dear fellow, that this was anything but an accident. And you must not feel abandoned, either. After all, you should realize that the members of your congregation can scarcely rally around when they don't even know where you are. Now, now." The Bishop didn't pat him on the head, but he might as well have. "There are certain things that must be done and I am here to do them."

"I am not—" said Macroy in gasps "—good enough—for the job."

"You have had a terrible shock," said the Bishop didactically, "a grievous loss, and a very bad night. I beg you to be guided by me. Will you be guided by me?"

The Bishop had already tried praying aloud, but when he had seen from a corner of his eye that the praying was only increasing Macroy's distress, he had cut it short.

"You know," he continued, leaving God temporarily unmentioned, "that I am perfectly sure of your complete innocence, that I entirely understand, that I mourn your dear wife with you, and that I want only to be helpful and do what is best? You know that, do you not?"

"I know," groaned Macroy.

"Well, now. Here is what I advise. First, you must make yourself presentable. I believe that your suitcase is now available. Then, since you are not to be in charge—and after all, Hugh, Sarah *isn't here*—you must come home."

"Where is home?" Macroy said. "I gave up the apartment. And I cannot go to Sarah's house."

"Home with me, of course," said the Bishop triumphantly. "Now, I have brought along young Price. His father used to do my legal work and the son has more or less inherited. Freddy may not be the churchman his father was, but he is trained and intelligent and surely he can be helpful in this unfamiliar thicket. There must be an inquest, you see. I want you to talk to him, and then you must talk to the Sheriff's man, but I should imagine only briefly. And, Hugh, I want you to brace yourself to your tasks. I shall drive you by your church and you will go to your office long enough to cancel or rearrange your appointments and delegate your responsibilities. You must be strong and you must not be afraid, for remember—" and the Bishop went into scripture.

When he had finished, the face was looking somewhat less strained; so the Bishop did pat Macroy, although only on a shoulder, and then he trotted back across the road to see whether there was any other way in which he could be helpful. A very busy man himself, the Bishop had had to cancel several appointments; but he did not begrudge his time and effort in this emergency. Obviously, poor Macroy was devastated, and the Bishop must and would take over.

Frederick Price, a busy young man in his middle thirties, ready and willing to be useful, came swinging into the court of the motel, carrying the Reverend Macroy's suitcase, which had been taken from Macroy's car. The car was now parked behind the Sheriff's office, still subject to examinations of some technical kind.

Price knocked on the proper door and went in, introduced himself, and offered the minister his own possessions. He saw the strain and the fatigue, of course, and was not surprised. He didn't believe this man was guilty of any crime. He guessed him to be a sensitive type and thought the whole thing, especially the damned red tape, was a rotten shame under the circumstances.

But Price was well acquainted with red tape.

As Macroy opened the suitcase and took out his shaving kit and a clean shirt, Price said, "I've been talking to Burns and the others. The inquest is set for Friday morning. I don't think we'll have any trouble at all, sir. I'll be with you. You'll be all right, sir, so don't worry. It's only a formality. As a matter of fact, there is no evidence of *any* kind."

"Evidence?" said Macroy vaguely. He went into the bathroom to shave, leaving the door open.

"Oh, by the way," sang out Price, loudly enough to be heard over the buzz of the little electric machine, "they found that motorist. The one who came by?" Price was practising lay psychology. He'd better not pour it on too thick or 'too soon—not all that he had found out. Chat a little. Engage the mind. Distract the sorrow. Un-numb the man, if he could.

"Captain Burns was pretty clever," he continued. "As soon as that call came in last night, he guessed from where. So right away he calls a man—Robbins is his name—the man who runs the first all-night gas station you hit once you're off the cliffs. He asked this Robbins to take a look and see if anyone had just been using the phone booth, and if possible to get the license number on his car. But the gas-station man did even better, because the fellow had used his credit card."

Price got up and ambled toward the bathroom, not sure he was being heard. Macroy seemed to be avoiding the sight of himself in the mirror while he shaved.

"Name was Mitchell Simmons."

"I beg your pardon?"

"The man who stopped, out there. On California One." Price understood Macroy's fragmented attention.

"He was very kind," murmured Macroy.

"What he was," said Price, "was very drunk. Oh, he corroborates what you say, of course. He's a salesman. Admits he was in high spirits, to coin a pun, and in the mood to pick up waifs and strays. Which is a risk, you know."

"It is?"

"Matter of fact," said Price cheerily, "it was one of his strays who phoned the Sheriff's office. Your kind friend was in no condition to dial, I guess."

The minister turned his clean-shaven face and it was full of pain.

Price said quietly, "I'm sorry. Didn't mean to say he wasn't kind. Look, I've got some further details. I suppose you'll want to know—er—just how she died. Burns will tell you. Or I can, if you like."

"Thank you," said Macroy. He came back into the bedroom and started to unbutton his rumpled shirt. "Yes?"

"She broke her neck on the rocks," said Price. "So it was instantaneous, if that's any comfort. No pain at all."

Macroy's face was still.

"She—well, you see—" Price was remembering uncomfortably that it may have taken very little time to fall forty feet, but it had taken some. "She was washed to and fro until she was—" Price didn't have the heart to say how battered. "Well, soaking wet, for one thing. The Coroner says that her bladder was empty, but that has *no* meaning. With death—"

Macroy sat down abruptly and put his hands over his face. "Go on," he said.

"That—er—part of it," said Price. "It's a little unfortunate that it has to be brought out. But I think I can assure you that it will all be handled in good taste, I think, by the way," Price changed the subject gladly, "that Minter was cooled off considerably. He certainly made a few poorly chosen remarks last night—about her estate, I mean. But he's thought twice about it and he'll be more circumspect in the future."

Macroy was shaking his head. "I don't want her money. I won't have anything to do with Sarah's money. That wasn't what she was worth."

Price was unable to keep from sighing his relief. "That's fine," he said innocently. "Now, please don't worry about Friday's inquest, sir. I'll be there, right by your side all the time. The thing is to give your testimony as quietly as possible and try to—I could coach you a little, perhaps. I've been through this before, you know."

"Thank you. Have they—finished with her?" Macroy took his hands down and seemed stiffly controlled. He didn't look at Freddy Price.

"The body will be released in time to be flown to Santa Carla for services on Saturday. Mrs. Minter wants the services there—because of her mother's friends. I'm sure—" Price stuck. The fact was, he couldn't be sure that Macroy was going to be welcome at his wife's funeral.

Macroy stood up and reached for his clean shirt.

"As for this inquest, that has to be, you know," said the young man. "It *will* be an ordeal. Why should I lie to you?"

Macroy looked at him curiously.

"But there's nothing to worry about, really," said Price heartily. "The important thing is to get you completely in the clear."

"Is it?" said Macroy monotonously.

In the car later on, the Bishop excused himself and began to work on some papers. Price was riding next to the Bishop's driver. Macroy sat silent in a rear corner.

When they pulled up before St. Andrew's, the Bishop noticed that Macroy was looking at it as if he had never seen it before. "Come," said Everard briskly, "run in. Your secretary will be there, I assume. Just make your arrangements as quickly as possible."

Price looked around. "You clergymen sound as if you're in the old rat-race, just like everybody else."

"Too true," sighed the Bishop, "too true."

Macroy got out and walked through the arch and across the flagstones and then into his office. Miss Maria Pinero, aged forty, leaped up and cried out, "Oh, Mr. Macroy! Oh, Mr. Macroy!" She had heard all about it on the air.

In the car Price said to the Bishop, "It's still a little hard to figure how she could have fallen. They didn't find a thing, sir. They can't even be sure just where she went over. Too many people messed around out there, while they were getting her up the cliff. But there's nothing for *him* to worry about, that's for sure."

"I see," said the Bishop, looking sternly over the tops of his spectacles. "Guide him, Freddy, will you? He's in a sad state."

"Do you think, sir," said Freddy Price, "I could possibly ask him to tone down his voice? It might sound—well, just a bit theatrical."

The Bishop's brows moved. "Bring it to his attention. That is, if you can get his attention." The Bishop sighed deeply. "No relatives. Nobody who can reach him on that needed human level. Well . . ."

"I'll take care of everything," Miss Pinero was saying. "Of

course, I will. I understand just how you feel. It seems so cruel. To get out, just to stretch her legs after a long, long drive—" She began to weep.

Miss Pinero was not an unhandsome woman, but something about her did not appeal to men. As a matter of fact, Miss Pinero did not like men, either. But the Reverend Macroy was different. So kind, so clean and gentle—and so distant. She would do almost anything for him. She had been so happy that he wouldn't be lonely any more.

"But God knows, doesn't He," she wept, "and we must believe that it is, somehow, for the best?" Carried away by her own noble piety—for it was her loss, too—she snatched up his right hand. Macroy snatched it away.

She looked up at him with tear-dimmed vision. She had never so much as touched him before, but surely he must know that taking his hand would have been like kissing the hem of his garment.

"I must leave now." He sounded strange.

"I'll be here," she cried, "and whatever you ask—"

"Forgive me," he said hoarsely.

He walked away. She knew that he staggered as he turned a corner, and her heart skipped. He sounded as if he couldn't bear to think of what she had almost done. Neither could she. Miss Pinero trembled. She wished it hadn't happened. She wished that Sarah Bright was still alive. Maria had felt so deliciously safe, and free to go on worshipping him.

The newspapers gave the story considerable space. After all, it had everything. They cautiously asked no questions, but they inevitably raised them. How could the elderly bride have fallen? There were some blithe spirits in the city who took to collecting the assorted circumlocutions having to do with the poor woman's reason for going off alone into the foggy dark. There was one columnist, based in the east, who—supposing that, of course, there was no such thing in Southern California as a religious group that was not led by some crackpot—was open to a suit at law. The Bishop considered it wiser to ignore him.

Macroy did not read the newspapers.

On Friday the inquest came rather crisply to the verdict of "Death from Accidental Causes."

Halley, telling how he had been the first to see a body, down below, was a model of professional objectivity. The medical part was couched in decently euphemistic language. Eunice Minter had not attended at all. Geoffrey Minter said that, as far as he knew, Mrs. Sarah Bright Macroy had been a happy bride. He exuded honorable fairness. Freddy Price was pleased on the whole with Macroy's behavior.

The minister, however, looked beaten and crushed. His voice was low and sad and tired. Everything droned along properly. When the Coroner, who was a straightforward country type, said bluntly, "You got back into the car for reasons of leaving her alone to do what she had to do?" Macroy answered, his voice dead against the dead silence of the room, "I thought, at the time, that it was the courteous thing to do."

A soft sigh ran across the ranks of those present.

"So you have no idea how she came to fall?" pressed the Coroner.

"No, sir."

And the Coroner thought to himself, Well, the truth is, me neither.

But when Price spoke finally, to inform the world in a quiet and matter-of-fact manner that the Reverend Macroy firmly and irrevocably refused to have any part of the Bright money—that did it.

Price got the minister through the swarming cameras and away, with an air of "Aw, come on, boys, knock it off," jaunty enough to arouse nobody's aggressions.

But afterward, as they drove back to the Bishop's house, young Price for the life of him could think of nothing to chatter about. Freddy would have enjoyed hashing it all over; he'd done his job. But this man was a type he didn't understand. So Freddy made do with the car radio.

The Bishop's spacious residence was well staffed; Macroy had every creature comfort. But the Bishop was simply too busy to spend many hours or even an adequate number of minutes with his haunted guest, who from time to time renewed his plea for a release from his vocation.

The Bishop, refusing to consider this, continued to advise patience, pending a future clarity. But, he said, obviously someone else would have to take over the Sunday services at St.

Andrew's. The Bishop had resolved to do it himself.

But he did think that if Macroy, with the help of God, could find the fortitude, he also ought to be there.

This martyred innocence, thought the Bishop (who *had* read the papers), had its rights, but also its duties. A man, he mused, must stand up to adversity.

On Saturday, at two o'clock, the funeral of Sarah Bright Macroy was well attended. The Minters and their two teen-age children sat invisibly in a veiled alcove. But those of Macroy's congregation who had had the temerity to come spotted him and nudged each other when he arrived a trifle late and sat down quietly at the very back of the chapel.

He did not join the family at any time; even afterward. Nor did he speak to any of his own people. When it was over, he vanished.

He had looked like a ghost. It was a little—well, odd.

On Sunday the Bishop, at the last minute, found himself unable to conduct the nine-thirty service, which had to be cancelled. (Although the organist played.) In consequence, at eleven o'clock St. Andrew's had all its folding chairs in its aisles.

Macroy, in his robe, was up there, inconspicuously, at the congregation's right or contra-pulpit side where, when he was sitting down, he was actually invisible to most. When they all stood, it was noticed that he did not sing the hymns; but he did repeat with them the Lord's Prayer, although his voice, which they were accustomed to hear leading, so richly and musically, the recitation of the ancient words, seemed much subdued.

Then the Bishop, who had never, himself, dwelt on some of the circumstances, and did not, for one instant, suppose that anyone *here* could do less than understand their essential pathos, made an unfortunate choice of words in the pastoral prayer.

"Oh, God," he prayed in his slight rasp, "Who, even in fog and darkness, seest all, be Thou his comfort; station him upon the rocks of his faith and Thy loving-kindness, that he may stand up—"

The ripple ran, gasping from some of the listeners, yet not so much sound as movement, swinging the whole congregation like grass, before it ceased and all sat stiffly in a silence like plush.

The Bishop sat down, a bit pinkly. He could not see Macroy very well. Macroy did not seem to have taken any notice. In fact,

Macroy had been moving, looking, acting, like an automaton. The Bishop was very much worried about him, and he now bemoaned his own innocence, which had tripped him up, on occasion, before. When it was time, he preached an old sermon that was sound, although perhaps a little less than electrifying.

Then there they were, standing together in the Narthex, as was the custom of St. Andrew's, Macroy a tall black pole beside the little black-robed beetle-bodied Bishop.

Now the people split into two groups, sheep from goats. Half of them simply went scurrying away, the women contriving to look harrassed, as if they were concerned for a child or had something on the stove at home, the men just getting out of here. The other half lined up, to speak first to the Bishop and gush over the honor of his appearance in their pulpit.

Then they each turned righteously to Macroy and said phrases like "So sorry to hear" and "Deepest sympathy" or a hearty "Anything I can do."

About twenty of them had gone by, like a series of coded Western Union messages, when Macroy put both hands over his face and burst into loud and anguished sobs.

The Bishop rallied around immediately and some of the older men shouldered through to his assistance. They took—almost carried—Macroy to his own office where, Macroy having been put down in his chair, the Bishop firmly shut the door on everybody else. He sat down himself, and used his handkerchief, struggling to conquer his disapproval of a public exhibition of this sort. By the time the Bishop had recovered his normal attitude of compassionate understanding, Macroy had stopped making those distressing and unmanly noises.

"Well, I was wrong," the Bishop announced good-naturedly. "I ought not to have urged you to come here and I am sorry for that. You are still in shock. But I want you to remember that *they* are also in shock, in a way."

The Bishop was thinking of the reaction to his boner. He was not going to quote what he had inadvertently said, since if Macroy had missed it, the Bishop would accept this mercy. Still, he felt that he ought to be somewhat blunt; it might be helpful.

"I'll tell you something, Macroy," he said. "You have got a fat-cat suburban bunch in this church, with economic status and—may the Lord help them all—middle-class notions of propriety. My dear fellow, they can't help it if they don't know

what to say to you, when it has probably never crossed their minds that the minister or his wife might sometimes have to go to the bathroom."

Then the Bishop sighed. "This is especially difficult for them, but they'll stand by you—you'll see. I'm sure that you can understand them, as well or better than I."

"It's not that I don't understand them," said Macroy. "It's that I can't love them." He had put his head down on his desk, like a child.

"Oh, come now—"

"I cannot," said Macroy. "So I must give it up. Because I cannot do it."

"I think," said the Bishop in a moment, "that you most certainly can't—that is, not yet. You must have time. You must have rest. Now, I shall arrange for substitutes here. Don't worry about it."

"Don't you still understand?" said Macroy drearily.

"Of course I do! Of course I do! It was simply too much for you."

"Yes. Yes, if you say so."

"Then, if the coast is clear, we had better go home." The Bishop thought that this might become a serious breakdown.

Poor tortured soul.

That evening the Bishop bustled from his study into his living room, where Macroy was sitting disconsolately idle.

"Now," the Bishop said in his raspy voice, "you know that you are very welcome in this house. There is plenty of room. The cooking is *not* bad. Everything here is yours. However, I am afraid that I shall have to be out of town for a day or two, beginning tomorrow. And I do not like to leave you all alone in your present state. So I am going to ask you to do something for me, Hugh. Will you promise?"

"Yes?" said Macroy listlessly.

"Will you talk to a Dr. Leone tomorrow?"

"A doctor?"

"He is a psychiatrist whom I've known for years. There have been occasions . . . he is excellent in his profession. He can give you a full hour tomorrow, beginning at one o'clock. I have set up the appointment and I think it is wise—very wise—that you keep it. He can help you through this very bad time."

"What?" said Macroy strangely. "Isn't God enough?"

"Ah, ah," said the Bishop, shaking a finger, "you must not despise the scientist. In his own way he is also a seeker after the truth. And God knows that you need some human help. That's why I simply cannot leave you here—don't you see?—alone. Yet I should go, I must. So will you please be guided by me and please do as I suggest?"

"Yes, I will," said Macroy apathetically.

"She died when you were twenty-five?" Doctor Leone said. He had observed the harsh lines on this face relax in memories of childhood, and he began to forgive himself for his own faulty technique. Well, he had to push this one. Otherwise the man would still be sitting silent as an owl by day, and there wasn't time. The doctor already knew that he would never see this man again.

"You were the only child?" he continued. "You must have adored her."

"I didn't pray to her, if that's what you mean," said Macroy with a faint touch of humor. "I loved my mother very much. But she wasn't perfect."

"How not?"

"Oh, she wasn't always—well, she didn't love everyone. She had a sharp tongue sometimes." But the voice was as tender as a smile.

"Didn't always love you, for instance?" the doctor said lightly.

"Of course she loved me. Always. I was her son." This was unimpassioned.

"Tell me about your father."

"He was a machinist, a hardworking man. A reader and a student by night. Very solid and kind and encouraging."

"You were how old when he died?"

"He died when I was twenty-seven—suddenly and afar."

The doctor listened closely to the way the voice caressed a phrase. "He loved you, of course. And you loved him."

"He was my father," the minister said with a faint wonder.

The doctor was beginning to wonder. Is he putting me on? He said with a smile. "Just background—all that we have time for today. Now, tell me about your first wife. Was it a happy marriage?"

"It was, indeed," said Macroy. "Emily was my young love, very dainty and sweet. A cherishable girl."

"You had no children?"

"No. We were sad about that. Emily, I suppose, was always frail."

"After she died, what did you do?"

"Went on, of course."

The doctor continued to suspend judgment. "Now, this second marriage. What did you feel for Sarah?"

"She was a lovely, lively spirit," said the minister. "We could talk. Oh, how we could talk."

He fell silent.

"And you loved her?"

"Not with the same kind of love," said Macroy, faintly chiding, "since we weren't young any more. We were very—compatible, I believe, is the accepted word."

Putting me on? He must be, thought the doctor. "And her money was no object," he said cheerily.

"The love of money is the root, Doctor."

"All right. I know my questions may sound stupid to you," said Leone. "They sound pretty stupid to me, as a matter of fact." He leaned back. Leone never took notes. He was trained to dictate, in ten minutes, the gist of fifty. "Now, I'm going to become rather inquisitive," he announced, "unless you know that you not only can but should speak frankly to me."

Macroy said gently, "I understand." But he said no more, waiting patiently.

Going to make me push, thought the doctor. All right. "Tell me about your honeymoon?"

"I see," said Macroy. "You want to know—whether the marriage was consummated? Will that phrase do?"

"It will do."

"No, it was not," said Macroy. "Although it would have been, sooner or later, I think. She was—so warm-hearted a presence and so lovable. But you see, we had understood, quite well . . ."

"You had both understood," said the doctor, more statement than question.

"I told you that we could talk," said Macroy, catching the latent doubt. "And that meant about anything and everything. That was our joy. As for—after all, in my case, Doctor, it had been nine years. I was a Minister of the Gospel," he added in a moment, gently explanatory.

"Did you try with Sarah and fail?" the doctor said easily.

"No."

"There wasn't a disillusion of any kind in the intimacy?"

"No. No. We enjoyed. We enjoyed. I can't be the only man in the world to have known that kind of joy."

Macroy's face contorted and he became silent.

"Which you have lost," the doctor said softly.

"Which I have lost. Yes. Thank you." The man's head bent.

"So the very suggestion that you—yourself—might have thrown all this violently away . . . It must have been very painful to you."

"Yes."

"Knowing that you wouldn't, couldn't, didn't—there's still that sense of guilt, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"Surely you recognize that very common reaction to sudden death, to any death, in fact." The doctor wasn't having any more nonsense. "You have surely seen it, in your field, many times. People who compulsively wish that they had done what they had not done and so on?"

"Oh, yes, of course. But am I not guilty for letting her venture alone on that cliff?"

"It was the natural thing."

"It is the human convention." The voice was dreary and again it ceased.

The Doctor waited, but time flew. So he said, "Every one of us must take his time to mourn his dead. But Bishop Everard tells me that you wish to give up the ministry, now. Why, Mr. Macroy?"

Macroy sighed deeply.

"I am thinking about the silly, but seemingly inevitable snickering, because of the circumstances."

The doctor hesitated. "The—er—circumstances do make an anecdote—for thoughtless people," he said. "That must be very hard for you to endure."

"Oh, my poor Sarah."

"Then, is this a factor?"

"I will say," said Macroy, "that I don't altogether understand that snickering. And why is it inevitable? If I may speak frankly to you, Doctor—"

Leone thought that there was a glint of life and challenge in the eyes.

"Surely," said Macroy, "every one of us knows his body's necessities and, furthermore, knows that the rest of us have them, too. Yet all of man's necessities are not as funny as all that. Men don't think it funny, for instance, that they *must eat*."

"The whole toilet thing," said the doctor, "is too ancient and deep-rooted to be fully understood. It may be that the unpleasantness is too plain a reminder of our animal status."

"We laugh at what we hate so much to admit?" Macroy said quickly.

"Possibly." The doctor blinked.

"'Tis a pity," Macroy said in mourning.

"Why," said the doctor, who was beginning to feel that *he* had fallen into some trap, "is it that a man like you, who can look with this much detachment at human inconsistencies, cannot transcend an unimportant and temporary embarrassment? Surely you ought not to be driven out of a life's work just because of—"

"I didn't say that those were my reasons."

"I'm sorry. Of course you didn't. What are your reasons?" The doctor was sunny.

"I cannot continue," said Macroy slowly, "because there are too many people I cannot love."

"Could you—er—amplify?"

"I mean that I felt so much anger. Fury. I hated them. I despised them. I wanted to hit them, shake them, scream at them, even hurt them back."

"In particular?"

"It began—" said Macroy. "No, I think that when the police officer asked me whether I had pushed Sarah to her death . . . Oh, it hurt. Of course, it did. But I remembered that he might be compelled, by the nature of *his* duties, to ask me such a thing. But then there was a newspaperman. And when to him—" the face was bitter—"Sarah's death meant somewhat less than the death of a dog would have meant to a man who never cared for dogs . . ."

Macroy's voice became cutting-sharp. "That's when I found myself so angry. I hated and I still do hate that man. From then on I have seemed to be hating, hating . . ."

The doctor was lying low, rejoicing in this flow.

"Sarah's own child, for instance," Macroy went on, "who was so cruel in her own pain. Oh, I know she was not herself. But I had better not go near her. I would want to make her suffer. Don't

you see? Of all the contemptible . . . I want revenge. Yes, I do. That young lawyer who missed the point. I know he meant no harm, but I just couldn't . . . I even loathe my poor secretary. For making some kind of idol out of me. But I'd known and understood and borne that for years. Even if she is wrong to do that, I should not suddenly *loathe* her for it. Yet I find I do. And I loathe the cowards and the hypocrites and the snickerers—they all disgust me. There seems to be no way that I can bring myself to love them. I simply cannot do it."

"You cannot love?" droned the doctor hypnotically.

"Even the Bishop, who is a good man. When he refuses—oh, in all good heart—to hear the truth I keep trying to tell him, sometimes I must hang on desperately to keep from shouting at him. Isn't that a dreadful thing?"

"That you can't love?" said the doctor. "Of course it is a dreadful thing. When your young love died so many years ago, perhaps—"

"No. No!" Macroy groaned. "You don't seem to understand. Listen to me. I was commanded to love. I was committed to love. And I thought I could, I thought I did. But if I *cannot do it*, then I have no business preaching in His Name."

"I beg your pardon?" The doctor's thoughts were jolted.

"In the Name of Jesus Christ."

"Oh, yes. I see."

"No, you don't! You don't even know what I'm talking about."

The doctor got his breath and said gently, "I see this. You have a very deep conviction of having failed."

"Indeed," said Macroy, "and I am failing right now. I would like, for instance, to hit you in the mouth—although I *know* you are only trying to help me."

The minister put both hands over his face and began to cry bitterly.

The doctor waited it out, and then he said that they wouldn't talk about it any more today . . .

When the Bishop returned to town he had a conference with Dr. Leone.

"He's had a traumatic experience," the doctor said, "that has stirred up some very deep guilt feelings, and, in projection, an almost unmanageable hostility that he never knew was there. I doubt he is as sophisticated as he thinks he is—in his

understanding of the human psyche, I mean. He does need help, sir. He isn't really aware of the demons we all harbor. It is going to take a lot of digging to get at the root."

"Hm. A lot of digging, you say?"

"And I am not the man," said Leone. "I doubt that he and I can ever establish the necessary rapport. Furthermore, my fees—"

"I know." The Bishop was much distressed. "But what is to be done, I wonder. He isn't fit, you imply, to go on with his tasks?"

"You know he isn't."

"Oh, me," the Bishop sighed. "And he has nobody, nowhere to be taken in. Since I—" the Bishop shook his head sadly—"am not the man, either. You don't think this—this disturbance will simply go away? If he has shelter? And time to himself?"

"May I suggest," said Leone smoothly, "that the State Hospitals are excellent? Very high-class in this state. And even the maximum fee is not too high."

"Well, as to that, there is what amounts to a Disability Fund. I should also suppose that the Minters, who are very rich people—" The Bishop was thinking out loud. "—Even if the marriage has to be declared invalid. But wouldn't it be cruel?" The Bishop blinked his eyes, hard. "Am I old-fashioned to think it would be cruel?"

"Yes, you are," said the doctor kindly. "He needs exactly what he can get in such a place—the shelter, the time, the trained attention. As far as time goes, it may be the quickest way to restore him."

"I see. I see." The Bishop sighed again. "How could it be done?"

"He would have to commit himself," said Leone gently.

"He would do so, I think," said the Bishop, "if I were to advise him to. It is a fearful—yet if there is no better alternative—"

"The truth is," said Leone fondly, "you have neither the free time nor the training, sir."

"We shall see," said the Bishop, who intended to wrestle it out in prayer. "We shall see."

Two years later Saul Zeigler approached the entrance with due caution. He had stuck a card reading PRESS in his windshield, anticipating argument since he wasn't expected; but to his surprise there was no gate, no guard, and no questions were asked. He drove slowly into the spacious grounds, found the Administration Building, parked, locked his car, and hunted down a certain Dr. Norman.

"Nope," said the doctor, a sandy-colored man who constantly smoked a pipe, "there is no story. And you won't write any. Absolutely not. Otherwise, how've you been?"

"Fine. Fine," said Zeigler, who was up-and-coming these days and gambling that he could become a highly paid feature writer. He'd had some bylines. "Just insane, eh?"

The doctor grinned cheerfully. "Not my terminology."

"Put it this way: you're not letting him out?"

"Uh-uh."

"Will you ever?"

"We hope so."

"When?"

The doctor shrugged.

"Well, I suppose I can always make do with what I've heard," said Zeigler impudently.

"Saul," said the doctor, "your dad was my old buddy and if I'd been the dandling type, I probably would have dandled you. So you won't do this to me. Skip it. Go see Milly. She'll have a fit if you don't drop in to say hello."

"So would I," Zeigler said absentmindedly. "Tell me, *did* he murder his wife?" There was no answer. "What set him off, then?"

"I'm not going to discuss a case with you or anybody else but the staff," said the doctor, "and you know it. So come on, boy, forget it."

"So how come I hear what I hear?" coaxed Zeigler.

"What do you hear?"

"You mean this is an instance of smoke without even one itty-bitty spark of fire? Not even one *semi-miraculous* cure?"

The doctor snorted. "Miraculous! Rubbish! And you're not going to work up any sensational story about him or this hospital. I can't help it if millions of idiots still want to believe in miraculous cures. But they're not coming down on us like a swarm of locusts. So forget it."

"I've met Macroy before; you know," said Zeigler, leaning back.

"Is that so?"

"Yep. On the night it happened."

"And what was your impression?"

"If I tell you," said Zeigler, "will you, just for the hell of it and off the record, tell *me* what goes on here?"

The doctor smoked contemplatively.

"Religion and psychiatry," said Zeigler, letting out his vocabulary and speaking solemnly, "have been approaching each other recently, wouldn't you agree, Doctor?—in at least an exploratory manner. Supposing that you had, here, a clue to that growing relationship. Is that necessarily a 'sensational' story?"

"Oh, no, you don't," said the doctor. "For one thing, he isn't preaching religion."

"How do you know?"

"I know."

Zeigler said, "You won't even let me talk to him, I take it."

"I didn't say so. If we understand each other—"

"Well, it was a long drive and it shouldn't be a total loss. Besides, I'm personally dying of curiosity. My impression, you want? Okay. I felt sorry for him, bleeding heart that I am," Zeigler mocked himself. "He was in shock and he sure had been pushed around that night. If he didn't always make plain sense, I wouldn't have made sense, either." Zeigler waited.

"I will admit," said the doctor between puffs, "that there have been some instances of sudden catharsis."

"Don't bother to translate," said Zeigler, crossing the trouser legs of his good suit, because Zeigler got around these days, and needed front. "I dig. How many instances?"

"A few."

"Quite a few? But no miracles. Didn't do a bit of good, eh?"

"Sometimes treatment was expedited." The doctor grinned at his own verbiage. "We are aware of a running undercurrent. One patient advises another. All right, you can go and talk to him."

"So if he doesn't preach, what does he do?"

"I don't know. They talk their hearts to him."

"Why don't you find out?" said Zeigler in astonishment.

"Tell me this, Saul. On that night was he annoyed with *you* in any way?"

"Might have been." Zeigler frowned. "He sure brushed me off. But he had taken quite a beating. I didn't blame him."

"Why don't you go and see him?" the doctor said. "I'd be interested in the reaction. Afterwards, come by, and we'll make Milly feed us a bite of lunch."

"Where can I find him?" Zeigler was out of the chair.

"How should I know?" said the doctor. "Ask around."

Zeigler went to the door, turned back. "I don't want to hurt him, Doc. How shall I—"

"Just be yourself," the doctor said.

Zeigler came out into the sunshine of the lovely day. He had never been to this place before and it astonished him. He had expected a grim building with barred windows and here he was on what looked like the sleepy campus of some charming little college, set between hills and sprawling fields, with the air freshened by the not too distant sea. There were green lawns and big trees, and some mellow-looking buildings of Spanish design. There was even ivy.

It was very warm in the sun. He unlocked the car, tossed his jacket inside, and snatched the PRESS card away from the windshield. He locked the car again, and began to walk. Ask around, eh? There were lots of people around, ambling on the broad walks, sitting on the grass, going in and out of buildings. Zeigler realized that he couldn't tell the patients from the staff.

The fourth person he asked was able to direct him.

The Reverend Hugh Macroy was sitting on a bench along the wide mall under one of the huge pepper trees. He was wearing wash trousers and a short-sleeved white shirt without a tie. He seemed at ease—just a handsome, well-tanned, middle-aged gentleman, quietly growing older in the shade.

Zeigler had begun to feel, although he couldn't tell who-was-who around here, that *they* could and were watching him. He approached the man with some nervousness.

"Mr. Macroy?"

"Yes?"

"Do you remember me, sir? Saul Zeigler."

"I don't believe I do, Mr. Zeigler. I'm sorry."

Zeigler remembered the voice well. But the face was not the old mask of agony and strain. The mouth was smiling, the dark eyes were friendly.

Zeigler said smoothly, "I'm not surprised you don't remember. I met you only once, a long time ago, and very briefly. Is it all right if I sit down?"

"Of course." The minister made a token shifting to give him more welcoming room on the bench and Zeigler sat down. "This place is sure a surprise to me," said Zeigler.

The minister began to chat amiably about the place. He seemed in every way perfectly rational. Zeigler felt as if he were involved in a gentle rambling conversation with a pleasant stranger. But it wasn't getting him anywhere.

He was pondering how to begin again when Macroy said, "But you are not a patient, Mr. Zeigler. Did you come especially to see me?"

"Yes, I did," said Zeigler, becoming bold. "I am a writer. I was going to write a story about you but I am not allowed to. Well, I wanted to see you, anyway."

"A story?"

"A story about all the good you do here."

"The good I do?" said the man.

"I've heard rumors about the good you have done some of these—er—patients."

"That isn't any story." Macroy seemed amused.

"So I'm told. And even if it is, I'm not going to be permitted to write it. I've given my word. Honestly, I won't write it."

The minister was looking at him with a pleasant smile. "I believe you," he said.

Zeigler found himself relaxing. "The truth is, I want in the worst way," he admitted, "to know what it is that you do here. Do you—well, preach to them, sir? I know you are a minister."

"No, sir. I am not. Not any more. And so, of course, I don't preach."

"Then what?"

"Oh, I listen to them. Some of them. Sometimes."

"But that's what the doctors do, isn't it? Do you listen *better*?"

Macroy said, as if to correct him gently, "The doctors here, and all the staff, are just as kind and understanding as they can be."

"Yes. But maybe you listen *differently*?"

Macroy looked thoughtful.

"The point is," pressed Zeigler, "if there is some kind of valuable insight that *you* have, shouldn't it be told to the world?"

"I'm not saving the world, Mr. Zeigler," said Macroy dryly. "I'm not *that* crazy. Or that good, either." He was smiling.

Zeigler, who had momentarily forgotten that this man was supposed to be insane, said, "Just a mystery, eh? You don't know yourself?"

"It may be," said Macroy melodiously, "because I am one of them. For I understand some of these sheep."

"In what way do you understand them, sir? I'm asking only for myself. Last time I saw you . . . Well, it has bothered me. I've wished *I* could understand." Zeigler really meant this.

Macroy was looking far away at the pleasant hills beyond the

grounds. Then, as if he had reached into some pigeonhole and plucked this out, he murmured, "One hell of a newspaperman."

"Yes, sir," said Zeigler, suddenly feeling a little scared.

But Macroy didn't seem perturbed. In a moment he went on pleasantly, "Some of them don't speak, you know. Some, if they do, are not coherent. What man can really understand them? But there are others whom I recognize and I know that I love them."

"That's the secret?" Zeigler tried not to sound disappointed. "Love?"

Macroy went on trying to explain. "They've fallen out of mesh, out of pattern, you know. When they have lost too many of their connections and have split off from the world's ways too far, then they can't function in the world at all."

Elementary, my dear Watson, thought Zeigler.

"But it seems to me," Macroy continued, "that quite a few of *them* didn't do what they were pressured to do, didn't depart from the patterns, because they could sense . . . Oh, they couldn't say how, they couldn't express it. Yet they simply knew that somehow the mark was being missed, and what the world kept pressuring them to do and be just wasn't good enough. Some, poor seekers, not knowing where there was *any* clue, have made dreadful mistakes, have done dreadful things, wicked things. And yet . . ." He seemed to muse.

Zeigler was scarcely breathing. Wicked things? Like murdering your wife, for instance?

"In what way," he asked quietly, "are you one of *them*, sir?"

"Oh." The minister was smiling. "I always wanted to be good, too. I was born yearning to be good. I can't remember not listening, beyond and through all the other voices, for the voice of God to speak to me, His child."

He smiled at Zeigler, who was feeling stunned. "I don't mean to preach. I only say that, because I have it—this yearning, this listening, this *hearing* . . ."

In a moment Zeigler said, rather vehemently, "I don't want to upset you. I don't want to trouble you in any way. But I just don't see . . . I can't understand why you're not back in the pulpit, sir. Of course, maybe you are expecting to leave here, some day soon?"

"I really don't know," said Macroy. "I cannot return to the ministry, of course. Or certainly I don't expect to. I must wait—as I would put it—on the Lord. And it may be that I belong here."

He caught Zeigler's unsatisfied expression. "Excuse me. The obvious trouble is, Mr. Zeigler, that every time they take me into town, as on occasion they do, sooner or later I stop in my tracks and burst into tears. Which wouldn't make me very useful in the pulpit, I'm afraid."

"I guess," said Zeigler, "you've had a pretty rough deal. In fact, I know you've had, but—"

"No, no," said Macroy. "That's not the point. It isn't what anyone did to *me*. It's what I couldn't do. And still can't. Of course, here, it is much easier. I can love these people, almost all of them."

"And you can't help trying to help them, can you?" Zeigler said, finding himself irresistibly involved. "Why do you say you don't expect to return to the ministry?"

"Oh, that's very simple," Macroy smiled a little ruefully. "I've explained, it seems to me, to a great many people." He sighed.

"I wish you'd explain it to me," said Zeigler earnestly.

"Then of course I'll try," said Macroy. "But I hope you'll understand that, while I must use certain terms, I don't mean to exhort you to become a Christian, for instance."

"I understand," said Zeigler.

"Christians were given two commandments," Macroy began slowly. "You, too, were given much the same ones, I believe, although in a different form."

"Go on," said Zeigler eagerly.

"The first is to love God, which God knows I do. But I was also committed to the second commandment and that one I could not obey. Oh, I longed to—I even thought that I was obeying. But it isn't, I discovered, a thing that you can force yourself to do. And when that grace—I mean, when it didn't come to me and I simply was not able—"

"To do what, sir?"

"To love them all."

"All?" Zeigler's hair stirred.

"That's what He said." Macroy was calm and sure. The voice was beautiful. "Thy neighbor? Thy enemy?"

And Zeigler saw it, suddenly. "You took it literally!" he burst out.

"Yes."

"But listen," said Zeigler in agitation, "that's just too hard. I mean, that's just about impossible!"

"It was certainly too hard for me" said Macroy, sadly, yet smiling.

"But—" Zeigler squirmed. "But that's asking too much of *any* human being. How *can* you love all the rotten people in the whole damn world—excuse me, sir. But surely you realize you were expecting too much of yourself."

"So they keep telling me," said Macroy, still smiling. "And since that's my point, too, I know it very well. What I don't feel they quite understand, and it is so perfectly plain to me—" He turned to Zeigler, mind-to-mind. "Suppose you are committed to follow Him, to feed His sheep, to feed His lambs, to be His disciple, which is a discipline, isn't it?—and suppose you cannot make the grade? Then, when you see that you cannot, mustn't you leave the ministry? How could I be a hypocrite, when He said not to be?"

"Let me put it in analogy," Macroy continued, warming to argument. "Some young men who wish to become airplane pilots wash out. Isn't that the term? They just can't make the grade. So they may not be pilots. They would endanger people. They may, of course, work on the ground."

Zeigler was appalled. He could not speak.

"So if I have necessarily left the ministry," said Macroy, "that doesn't mean that I may not love as *many* as I can."

Zeigler saw the image of a ray of light that came straight down, vertical and one-to-one. Suddenly there was a cross-piece, horizontal, like loving arms spread out—but it had broken. Zeigler's heart seemed to have opened and out of it flooded a torrent of such pity, such affectionate pity, that he thought he was going to cry.

A thousand schemes began to whirl in his brain. Something should be done. This man *should* be understood. Zeigler would storm into the doctor's office. Or he *would* write a story, after all.

Zeigler said, his voice shaking, "Thanks, Mr. Macroy, for talking to me. And may the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and shine upon you and give you peace."

Macroy looked up. His look made Zeigler turn and hurry away.

Zeigler, speeding along the walk, was glad no one else had heard him sounding off in singing scripture, like some old rabbi, for God's sakes! Okay, he'd felt like doing it and he had done it and what was it with the human race that you'd better not sound as if you felt something like that?

Maybe that man *is* crazy! But I love him!

Just the same, Zeigler wasn't going back to Doctor Norman's office, not right now. There'd been a reaction, all right, but he didn't care to have it seen all over his face. He'd go see Milly Norman who would give him some coffee and gossip. She always did. He'd take time to cool it. Or figure out how to translate it—

No, let the man alone, let him stay where he was. Why should Zeigler say one word to help get Hugh Macroy back into the stinking world, which would *kill* him. Sure as hell, it would.

Zeigler was blind and he ran slambang into a man and murmured an apology.

"Hey," said the man, moving to impede him further, "hey, Press, you get any good news outta the nutty preacher, hey, Press?"

"Nothing I can use," said Zeigler bitterly. He started off, but he thought, Love them *all*?

So he stopped and looked experimentally at this stranger. Here was a patient. Zeigler didn't doubt it. A middle-aged, foxy-faced, shambling man, with salted red hair, little beady eyes, and soft repellent lips. A more unlovable sight Zeigler had seldom seen.

Just the same, he said aloud and heartily, "Hey, don't you worry about a thing, old-timer," and then, with his eyes stinging, but telling himself to stop being so much the way he *was*, because he'd never make it, anyhow—suddenly it was too much for him and Zeigler sprinted to his car.

In a little while a man shambled up to where Macroy still sat on the bench under the pepper tree.

"Hey, you the Reverend Macroy?"

"I'm Hugh Macroy. Not a Reverend."

"Well—er—my name's Leroy Chase."

"How do you do, Mr. Chase?"

"Yah. Glad to meetcha. Say, listen, there's something I guess I gotta tell you."

"Sit down," said Macroy cordially.

The man sat down. He put his unkept hands through his graying red hair. "I'm kinda nervous."

"You needn't tell me anything."

"Yah, but I wish—I mean, I want to."

"Well, I'm listening."

"Well, see, it's a kinda long story."

"Go ahead."

"Well, see, I was up Salinas this time and I was hitching back down to L.A."

Macroy had turned his body slightly toward his companion.

"Well," the man said, "I guess you know that hitchers can't be choosers: Hah! So I get this ride and this stupe, he takes California One." Chase's little eyes shifted nervously.

Macroy said, "I see."

"So he dumps me in Big Sur, which is nowhere. So when I finally get another hitch south, I figure I'm lucky. Only trouble is, I find out *this* bird is juiced up pretty strong, and when the fog starts rolling in, believe me, I'm scared. So I want out. So I get out. So there I am."

The man was speaking in short bursts. "In that fog, what am I? A ghost or something? Who can see a thumb? Nobody is going to take his eye off the white line to look, even. And it gets dark. And what can I do?"

Macroy was listening intently, but he kept silent.

The red-headed man chewed on his own mouth for a moment before he went on. "Well, I got my blanket roll on me, so I figure I'll just bed down and wait out the fog, Why not? So I find this big rock and I nest myself down behind it, where no car is going to plow into me, see? And there I am, dozing and all that. Then there's this car pulls off the road and stops, right ten, fifteen feet in front of me."

The man leaned suddenly away to blow his nose. Macroy looked away, flexed one ankle, then let it relax. He said nothing.

"So I wonder, should I jump up and beg a ride? But it's all so kinda weird, see—white air, you could say?" Chase was gesturing now, making slashes in the air for emphasis. "A man gets out with a flashlight. It's like a halo. And the other party gets out, see. Well, I dunno what's up. I can't see too good. I know they can't see me. I got a gray blanket. I'm practically another rock. And I'm lying low and thinking, why bother?"

The man's speech became slower, his voice a little deeper. "What's the matter with where I am, I think. It's kinda wild out there that night—the white air and all. And I can hear the sea. I always liked listening to the sea, especially by myself, you know?"

Macroy nodded. His eyes were fixed on the man's face.

"Listen, you know what I'm trying to—"

"I'm listening."

"So when this person starts coming along with the flash, I turn my face, so it won't show—"

"Yes," said Macroy, with a strange placidity.

"Then the light goes down on the ground. It don't fall, see? It's just pointing down. And I'm wondering what the hell—excuse me—when . . ." The voice was getting shrill. "My God, I know what she's gonna do! Listen, no man can take a thing like that, for God's sake!"

The man was crying now, crying. "So I think, 'Oh, no, you don't! Not on *me*, you don't!' So I just give a big heave and, holy God, it's too close! And over she goes! Oh, listen, I never meant—I never—But who could take a thing like that?"

Chase was now on the edge of the bench. "Before I know what I'm doing, I drag my roll and I'm running up the edgy side, north. My life is in my feet, brother, but I gotta get out of there. It's just instinct, see? I could hear you calling—"

"You heard me?" Macroy was looking at the sky.

"Listen. Listen. So I'm about half, three-quarters of a mile away and now here comes this car going south. So I figure to look like I been going south the whole while. That way, I never *was* there. And damned if this guy don't stop in the fog and pick me up. Well, I soon find out *he* ain't exactly cold sober, but by this time I don't care, I'm so— Then what does he have to do but stop for you? But you tell him to send help and we just—we just went on by."

Chase slumped. He would fall off the bench in a few moments.

"If you had told me then—" Macroy had shut his eyes.

"Oh, listen, Mister, maybe you're some kind of saint or something but I didn't know, not then. Didn't even know you was a preacher."

"And you had two chances."

"Well, I had—well, three really. But look, nobody coulda said I'd done that on purpose. Maybe manslaughter. Who knows? What I couldn't take was the—was the *motive*. See, it's too damned hilarious. What I couldn't take was the big hah-hah. I mean, I knew she never saw me. I know that. *She* wouldn't have done a thing like that. But all I thought at the time was 'Hey, this I don't have to take.' If I would have stopped for one second—but here it comes, outta the night, you could say—who's going to understand? Who? Because what a screaming howl, right?"

Chase was sobbing. He wasn't looking at Macroy. He sobbed into the crook of his own elbow.

Macroy said musingly, "Yes, it is supposed to be quite funny."

"Listen, what I did do." Chase gathered voice. "This happy-boy, he fin'ly gets into that gas station, and he don't even know what day it is. The message is long gone from his mind. So I made the call to the Sheriff. That was the third chance. But I chickened out. I hung up. And I say 'so long' to this happy character and go in the café and when I see the cop car rolling I figure I done all I could and maybe she's okay. I'm praying she's okay. It was the best that I could do." He hiccupped.

They were silent then, in the sunshine that had crept around the tree.

Macroy said in a moment or two, "Why are you here?"

Chase mopped his face with his sleeve. "Oh, I fall apart, see?" he said rather cheerfully. "I practically never been what they'd call 'together.' You talk about chances. I had plenty chances. But not me, I wouldn't stay in school. I coulda even gone to college. But I wouldn't go. So I'm forty years old and I'm crying in my wine, when I can get any, like a baby whining after a shining star, too far—" The man controlled his wailing rhyme abruptly. "Well. So. Now they don't know what else to do with me. So I'm a nut. That's okay."

He relaxed against the back of the bench with a thump. "So now," he spoke quietly, "I'll do anything. I mean clear your name? If you want? What can they do to me?"

Macroy didn't speak.

"I wish—" said Chase. "Well, anyhow, now you know it wasn't your fault and it wasn't her fault, either. And it wasn't—" He stopped and seemed to listen, anxiously.

"Excuse me," said Macroy. "I was wondering what I would have done. I'm no saint." Macroy turned his face. "And never was."

"But I didn't know you, Mr. Macroy," Chase began to be agitated again. "You got to remember, for all I knew, you mighta killed me."

Macroy said, "I might have. I *think* not. But I wouldn't have laughed."

Chase drew in breath, an in-going sob. "Ah, you don't know me, either. All I ever been is a bum, all my life. I never did no good or been no good."

"But you wish you had? You wish you could?"

"God knows!" The cry came out of him, astonished.

"Yes. And I believe you." Macroy bent his head. "I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That woman was very dear to me. Very dear."

"Don't I believe it?" cried Chase as if his heart had split. "Oh, God, don't I *know!* I heard you calling her. I knew it in your voice." Chase was sobbing. "I remember a thing—what they say in church—I remember. Don't tell me it was good enough, the best I could do. Because it wasn't, and that's what I know."

Chase was on his knees and hanging to the minister's knees, and sobbing. "Oh, listen, listen. I'm sorry. I got a broken heart. Believe me? Please believe me!"



Edward D. Hoch

The Rainy-Day Bandit

The pattern was there, the modus operandi was always the same—an armed holdup in daylight, in the rain. But they could never catch him. Each time he managed to get away . . .

The elusive rainy-day bandit was not Captain Leopold's official concern. The Captain knew about the case—everybody did; but Leopold was head of Homicide, and he'd get into the high-stakes game only if the bandit raised the ante—from armed robbery to murder . . .

Detective: CAPTAIN LEOPOLD

Sam the clean-up man took Captain Leopold's car and anchored it firmly to the endless chain that would carry it through the steaming, splashing suds of the car wash. "How are you today, Captain?" Sam shouted above the roar of machinery.

"Good as could be expected on a Monday morning," Leopold shouted back. "Don't know why I'm getting it washed. Looks like it's going to rain any minute."

Sam squinted at the leaden sky and walked over to Leopold's side. "Sure hope not. I need a full week's work to pay my taxes."

Leopold nodded sympathetically. The 15th of April was only a week away, and with the extra surtax this year it was hurting everybody. He found himself reluctant even to pay out the cost of the car wash, wondering why he didn't sometimes chisel a bit like everyone else and have it cleaned at the city garage along with the official detective cars.

It was that sort of day, and it lasted even after he'd waved goodbye to Sam and the other workmen and wheeled out onto the street, heading downtown. In the other lane he noticed an unmarked police car with a detective from Robbery at the wheel. Tommy Gibson. A nice guy, someone everybody liked, but who was not above taking a little graft on the side. There were a few

others like him in the department, but they were not really Leopold's concern as head of Homicide. Tommy Gibson could take his petty graft. As for Leopold, he'd still pay to have his own car washed.

Sergeant Fletcher was already in the office with Leopold's coffee, and that made him feel a bit better. "You're late, Captain."

"Stopped to get my car washed. Saw Tommy Gibson on the way in. What's he up to these days?"

Fletcher sipped his own coffee from the paper cup. "Robbery, same as always. He's in charge of this holdup investigation right now. Probably hoping it won't rain today."

"The rainy-day bandit?" Although robbery was not directly in Leopold's province, he was aware of the crimes, as was everyone else in the city. Perhaps that was why Tommy Gibson was out cruising on a threatening Monday morning in April.

The first robbery had been a small-time affair—the stickup of a parking-meter collector during a chilling rainstorm back in January. It was followed three weeks later by one a little more daring—a gas-station holdup. Then came an insurance office, and the branch of a bank, and most recently a wealthy gambler on his way to the bank with a deposit. The crimes were identical in their execution. The day—for they were always daylight crimes—was dark and overcast, with a heavy rain falling. The bandit wore a cloth mask that covered his entire face, and he carried a shiny nickel-plated revolver. Not one of the five victims doubted he would have shot any one of them dead at the first indication of resistance. In the case of the bank robbery—the bandit's most profitable venture to date—he'd actually knocked two people to the floor as he dashed for the street.

"The Commissioner's pushing Tommy for an arrest," Fletcher said. "This is the sort of thing the newspapers love. Since he robbed that gambler last week, they're almost beginning to treat him like a modern Robin Hood."

"He's getting more active with the spring rains," Leopold observed. "Two holdups so far this month, and it's only the eighth."

There'd been an early Easter this year, and an early spring. Somehow the whole year seemed hurried, as if racing toward summer. Fletcher put down his coffee. "Well, at least it's no concern of ours."

"No," Leopold agreed. "Not unless he kills someone."

The rain started in midafternoon, driving hard out of the west. It sent pedestrians scattering and slowed traffic to a crawl. Captain Leopold looked up once from the autopsy report on his desk to watch it beating on his windows, but then he went back to work and paid no more attention to the downpour. After five o'clock it settled into a steady drizzle that promised to last the night.

It was nearly six when Sergeant Fletcher poked his head around the corner of the door. "You still here, Captain?"

"Going home soon."

"Tommy Gibson's rainy-day bandit hit again."

"Oh? Where?"

"A shopping center on Millrose. Around an hour ago. Cleaned out six cash registers in a supermarket while fifty people watched. The guy's got guts, you have to say that!"

"He takes too many chances," Leopold said sourly. "Some day an eager citizen's going to jump him, and then we'll either have a captured bandit or a dead hero."

The rain lasted through the night as expected. It was still coming down in the morning, although it had tapered off to a damp drizzle that was more annoying than anything else. Leopold was at his desk early, before eight, and he was just beginning to think about his morning coffee when the call came in to Fletcher's desk.

"We've got a killing, Captain," Fletcher said, already reaching for his raincoat. "Want to come along? The cop who called in thinks it might have been the rainy-day bandit."

Leopold nodded. "Let's go."

The dead man was sprawled in an alley on Carter Street, his body wet from rain, his eyes staring unseeing at the leaden sky. He'd been shot once in the left temple, and there was no sign of the gun. Leopold glanced at the body and then looked around at the little group of men. He saw Tommy Gibson at once.

"This a rainy-day bandit caper, Tommy?"

"Looks like it, Captain. Victim's name is James Mercer. He was an insurance agent making collections in the neighborhood. The money's gone, though."

"Anybody see it happen?"

Gibson glanced up at the empty windows. "Not in this neighborhood. They're mostly first-generation Americans, a lot of

them on welfare. They never see a thing."

Leopold nodded. "It could be your bandit. But it could be anybody. Does he have a list of his collection stops?"

Sergeant Fletcher had been going quickly through the pockets of the dead man's soggy topcoat. "This might be what you want, Captain."

There were twenty-one names and addresses in the little notebook, each with an amount and a series of dates written after it. Eleven of them had been checked off. "He didn't collect much," Leopold observed, adding quickly, "About fifty bucks."

"Where do we start?" Fletcher wanted to know.

"At the last name he checked off. Rose Sweeney. It's just down the street."

They left the body in the care of the technical men with their cameras and plastic bags and went in search of Rose Sweeney. She proved to be a buxom woman of forty or so, with graying hair and thick, round glasses that gave her the look of a startled owl. Her apartment was cluttered with the flotsam of a lifetime, piled here and there on tables as if she'd just moved in. Through it all, she seemed to feel her way as she directed them to dusty chairs.

"Yes," she said in answer to their first question, "that nice Mr. Mercer was here for his money just about an hour ago."

"Did he seem upset, nervous?"

"No, just quiet. More quiet than usual, I'd say. I gave him the money—four dollars—and he left right away."

"Did he always come at the same time?"

She blinked her eyes and nodded. "Every other Tuesday morning, first thing. Right after he calls on Mr. Tydings down the street. What's the matter? Is something wrong?" She looked from one to the other, seeming to smell the odor of panic they'd brought with them to her cluttered apartment.

When they left Rose Sweeney, Leopold sent Fletcher to check on the apartment houses across the street while he continued down the block to the little clapboard cottage owned by Mr. Tydings. In its day, when the area had prided itself on horse-drawn carriages and a good view of the river a few miles below, the cottage had probably been a little gem set among the larger homes. Now, with the area racially mixed, with Polish and Irish and Negro and Puerto Rican workers living in what had originally been the Italian section of town, the cottage had taken on a shabby appearance.

And George Tydings himself was no less shabby. He needed a shave, and his pale thin hands shook with the effects of some early-morning drinking. The bottle, cheap vodka, was still visible on the kitchen table. "What is it?" he asked tiredly. "What's all the trouble?"

"There's been a shooting," Leopold told him, getting directly to it. "The insurance man—James Mercer. I understand he called on you earlier this morning."

"Sure. He was here. I paid him my money and he left."

"Nothing unusual?"

"He seemed the same as always."

"And you saw nothing through your windows?"

"Not a thing." He wandered back out to the kitchen, seeking his bottle. Leopold watched him weave carefully around a low bookcase that partially blocked the kitchen door. While Tydings poured himself a drink from the bottle, Leopold glanced at the ragged paperbound books that filled the case. But there was nothing unusual—mysteries, science fiction, a few modern novels by Roth and Bellow and Updike, a book on ventriloquism, and another on bricklaying. In a mystery novel that would have been a clue, and Leopold found his mind concocting strange combinations—a voice from inside a walled-up tomb, with some sort of Poesque twist at the end. A ventriloquist kills his wife, then—

"Want a drink?" George Tydings called from the kitchen table.

"Too early in the day," Leopold said. "You a bricklayer?"

"Huh? Oh, the book. I was going to put a barbecue pit in the back yard. Never got around to it. Neighborhood's going to pot. So why bother?" He came back in, moving again around the awkwardly placed bookcase.

"Live here alone?"

A nod. "Since my wife left me. She fooled around with the milkman—would you believe it, the *milkman*?—and I finally tossed her out. Lost my job last week, too."

"Sorry to hear that."

Tydings seemed suddenly sad and sober. "Had a good job, too. I went to college for two years. Wouldn't believe it now, would you?"

Leopold let himself out the front door and walked around the back of the cottage, through weeds and grass coming alive with the rains of spring. There was no barbecue pit. He walked

farther, to a rear alley; and followed it behind an apartment building to the alley where Mercer's body had been found. Sergeant Fletcher was there waiting for him, but by now the body had been taken away.

"Find anything, Captain?"

"Probably nothing. Check on a man named Tydings, especially on a wife who's supposed to have left him recently. And while you're at it, do a check on Rose Sweeney." He glanced down at the alley pavement where the body had been lying. "How about you? Anything?"

"Maybe," Fletcher answered. "You should talk to him."

"Him? Who?"

"Name's Kansas Johnson—lives across the street. He was next on the collection list, but Mercer never got there."

Johnson was standing tall and silent in the street with one of the uniformed patrolmen. "You Kansas Johnson?" Leopold asked.

"That's me."

"What did you see?"

"Nothin'."

Leopold turned to Fletcher. "Well?"

"He had a fight with Mercer last month when he came to collect. Punched him in the jaw."

Johnson shifted his feet. "Not hard. I just tapped him. He came up behind me in the street and grabbed my shoulder. I didn't know who it was at first. Hell, I paid him the money and said I was sorry."

"And you didn't see him today?"

"No, sir."

Leopold sighed, then turned to Fletcher. "You'd better get a full statement from him about the incident last month. Then see what else you can find around here. I'm going back downtown."

It was mid-afternoon when James Mercer's widow arrived with her brother to identify the body. She was a handsome woman with faded blonde hair and what was still a good figure. Leopold questioned her briefly. It was a part of the job he never liked.

"Mrs. Mercer, did your husband have any enemies?"

"None. Everyone liked him."

"Did he say anything about a fight he had with a man named Kansas Johnson a few weeks back?"

"No. He didn't tell me much."

"Do you have any children?"

"A son away at college."

The brother cleared his throat. "Mrs. Mercer is highly distraught, Captain. Is all this questioning necessary?"

"I'm sorry," Leopold agreed. "That will be all. If you will just identify the body—"

Later, when Leopold was alone again, Tommy Gibson strolled in. "I guess you're in on the big bandit hunt too, Captain."

"If the bandit did it."

"It sure looked like him from where I stand. Fits him like a glove."

"Except how did he know Mercer was collecting?"

Tommy Gibson dropped into a chair and lit a cigarette. "What the hell! He knew Mercer, or he followed him. I don't know! I just know I'd bet my badge it's the rainy-day bandit."

"Look," Leopold tried to reason, "would Mercer be the type to jump a man with a gun?"

"Sure. Why not?"

Last month a fellow named Johnson punched him and apparently Mercer didn't hit back. He doesn't sound like the sort to go after a man with a gun."

Sergeant Fletcher came in then, his coat dripping from the renewed rain. "I think we'll need an ark to get home tonight," he grumbled. "Hi, Tommy."

Leopold leaned back in his chair. "What's the report?"

"I've got lots of info, but none of it's much good. The fight between Mercer and Kansas was strictly a one-punch affair—a misunderstanding. Nothing to it. And Tydings' wife really left him. She's living in Boston."

Leopold nodded. "Anything else?"

"The woman, Rose Sweeney—she's legally blind."

"What?"

"Oh, she can see a little with those thick glasses—shapes and things—but the neighbors claim it's bad enough to get her a pension for being blind."

"Then she might not have seen the killer if he was right behind Mercer."

"Probably not," Fletcher agreed.

Leopold didn't like it. "What about the bullet?" he asked.

"A .38. It could have come from the type of gun the rainy-day bandit always carries."

Leopold knew the type of gun. He kept one locked in the glove compartment of his car, though he'd never had to use it. "Anything else?"

"Nothing much. Except that he wasn't killed where we found the body."

Leopold wasn't sure he'd heard correctly. "What?"

"He wasn't killed there. Not enough blood. And the soles of his shoes were dry. He was shot somewhere else and dropped there."

"Oh."

"What do you think, Captain?"

Leopold reached for a cigarette. He rarely smoked these days, but he needed one just then. "I think that pretty much rules out the rainy-day bandit."

Tommy Gibson grunted agreement. "It might rule out robbery as a motive, too."

"He's right," Leopold told Fletcher. "A robber wouldn't bother moving the body."

"So where are we?"

"Nowhere," Leopold admitted. "Start checking the usual angles—wife, brother-in-law. And go talk to that Rose Sweeney again. Whatever happened, it was after he left her apartment."

It was raining harder when Leopold headed home, a little after nine.

At eight o'clock the following morning it was still raining, although the weather forecast was optimistic for the afternoon. Leopold had left his lonely apartment early, as was his habit when working on a difficult case. Fletcher had a wife and children to occupy him at home; and Leopold didn't mind doing a bit of the legwork at times like this. He was well aware that only a political expediency had brought him the rank of captain in the first place. In another time, another city, he would have ranked no higher than Tommy Gibson's lieutenancy.

But there were certain privileges that came with the rank of captain. If they didn't extend to a free car wash at the headquarters garage, they did include a police radio installed under the dashboard of his own car. Now, flipping it on through habit, he heard a routine report of a robbery in progress. "All cars, all cars! Masked man observed entering all-night diner at Fifth and Lakefront. Proceed with caution. May be rainy-day bandit."

Leopold glanced at the street sign and realized he was only four blocks from the scene. He gunned the motor and raced down a side street.

The pavement on Lakefront was slick from the rain as he turned into it on two wheels, almost overturning. He slowed his speed as the diner came into view, then saw the masked figure dart from the doorway. The man saw and recognized him, and now he broke into a run, heading across a field.

Leopold skidded the car to a stop and jumped out, tugging at his service revolver. "Stop or I'll shoot!" he shouted into the morning air.

The masked bandit turned and brought up the familiar nickel-plated revolver. But then suddenly he slipped on the wet grass and the gun roared harmlessly into the air. Leopold knelt and fired once and thought he'd hit the mark, but the bandit scrambled to his feet and was off and running again. Leopold fired once more and missed, then saw a police car pull up on the side street and two officers joined in the chase. It seemed for a moment that the masked man was trapped. They had backed him against a rain-flooded creek that was surely too wide for him to jump.

But again he fooled them. He launched himself across the water with a flying leap as Leopold and the officers all fired. The three bullets might have been made of putty. The bandit glanced back once, then vanished into the woods beyond the creek.

Leopold shouted at the nearest officer, "Captain Leopold, Homicide! Get back to your car and call for help. Try to head him off on the other side of the woods. We might have a chance of catching him."

"The guy's a damned phantom!"

"That's the reputation he's got," Leopold said, brushing off his trousers under the raincoat. "You were just shooting at the rainy-day bandit."

"I'll be damned!"

"But I think he dropped something when he fell." Leopold headed back for the spot in the grass and after a moment's searching found it. "His gun!" He picked up the revolver carefully, hoping it had prints but knowing it was probably useless.

"Think that'll help identify him, Captain?" one of the officers asked.

"I don't know. But at least it'll tell me whether or not he killed a man named James Mercer."

Fletcher phoned in just after lunch. "Hey, Captain, the sun's shining out here!"

Leopold grunted. "Where are you—Florida?"

"Would you believe Centerville?"

"I'd believe anything. But why Centerville?"

"Checking on Mercer's brother-in-law. He lives over here. He's clear, though. He was in his office all morning till his sister called him about the murder."

"It was worth checking anyway. When you come in I'll tell you about my shoot-out with the rainy-day bandit."

"You got him?"

"No."

"Oh."

"But I'll tell you about it." He hung up and went to look out the window, seeking some break in the clouds to the west. After all, Centerville wasn't that far away.

"Captain?"

"Yes, Tommy."

Lieutenant Gibson placed a typed report carefully on Leopold's desk. "It's the ballistics check on the bandit's revolver."

"Same gun that killed James Mercer?"

"No. Nothing like it."

When Gibson didn't move away from the desk, Leopold turned from the window. "Then what's the trouble, man? Why are you standing there like that?"

"It's just that—well, I think you must have gotten the weapons confused, Captain."

"Confused?"

"We checked the ownership on the gun—and it's registered to you."

"To me!" Leopold snorted. "That's impossible! I fired at him with my service revolver. It doesn't look anything like this weapon."

But Gibson stood firm. "Nevertheless, Captain, the serial number shows the gun's been registered to you for three years."

"Let me see that!" Leopold snatched both report and weapon. The gun did look familiar. Too familiar. He wondered why he hadn't realized it when he picked it up from the grass. "It was stolen from me," he said quietly.

Tommy Gibson frowned. "By someone in the department, Captain? I hope you don't mean—"

The telephone rang and Leopold answered it. "Yes? Leopold here."

"Captain, we just got a trouble call from a Miss Rose Sweeney on Carter Street. She asked for you."

"I'm on my way," Leopold almost shouted. Outside, the sun had finally broken through the clouds.

He parked in a puddle outside her apartment, thankful that a patrol was already on the scene. Rose Sweeney was inside with the officer, tears rolling from behind the thick glasses that covered her eyes. "He tried to kill me," she sobbed. "I opened the door and he grabbed at my throat!"

"Who was it, Miss Sweeney?"

"I couldn't see. Just a shape in the doorway. When I started screaming he ran away."

"Come on," Leopold told the officer. "I've got a hunch."

He led the way down the street, aware of the sunlight reflecting on the puddles of water, more aware of the curtains moving in windows as the people of Carter Street watched this latest incident. He recognized Kansas Johnson across the way, ducking into an alley between two apartment buildings.

They reached the little cottage of George Tydings just as he was closing the front door. Leopold hit the door with his shoulder and pushed it open. "Hello again, Mr. Tydings."

"What do you want now? What is all this?"

"A little conversation, that's all." Leopold saw the suitcase half packed on the floor. "You weren't thinking of taking a trip, were you?"

"I—"

Then Leopold said to the officer, "Move that bookcase aside and see if there's a bloodstain on the rug under it."

George Tydings took a step backward, and then seemed about to spring on them. But all at once he collapsed into sobs. "All right, I did it! I killed him!"

Leopold cleared his throat. "I must warn you of your rights under the law. You need make no statement until your lawyer is present."

"What difference does it make? I killed him. I dropped the gun down the sewer in the back alley." He sat down at the table,

looking up at Leopold. "How'd you know about the bloodstain?"

"The bookcase was half blocking the kitchen door. It just seemed out of place on my earlier visit. When I learned that Mercer had been killed elsewhere, a hidden bloodstain seemed at least a possibility. You killed him here, then carried his body out the back door and through the alleys to where it was found. I took the route myself the other morning. Once you'd killed him, you hit on a clever gimmick that almost worked. You knew he collected from Rose Sweeney next, and you knew she was almost blind—could distinguish only shapes. So you went there, pretending to be Mercer, and collected her money. You wanted it to appear that the killing took place after he left your cottage. You're interested in ventriloquism, so I assume you could change your voice enough to approximate Mercer's. Besides, she said he was quiet that day. Only you began to worry that she'd recognized you after all, and so you tried to kill her just now."

Tydings had buried his head in his hands. "You don't know how it was," he sobbed.

"I think I can guess," Leopold said. "You stole the collection money to make it look like the work of the rainy-day bandit, but in reality your motive was quite different. You told us your wife was fooling around with the milkman. It's not too far-fetched to suppose she was fooling around with the insurance man too when he dropped by. Perhaps he admitted it when you accused him, or perhaps you didn't need an admission to believe the worst and kill him."

"Yes," Tydings mumbled. "Yes." Leopold wasn't sure which question he was answering, which guilt he was admitting. But it really didn't matter any more . . .

Tommy Gibson came in the following morning while Leopold and Fletcher were having their morning coffee. "You did mighty nice work on that Mercer killing, Captain."

"That type's never difficult. He was almost anxious to confess. I'm surprised he didn't admit it the first time I questioned him."

Gibson nodded. "I'm sort of sorry he didn't turn out to be my bandit, though. We're as much at a dead end as ever on that."

Leopold smiled. "Pray for sunshine, and that he doesn't find another gun. Maybe he'll know when his luck has run out."

"What do you think he does on days when the sun shines?" Fletcher asked.

"If we knew that—" Leopold began.

And then suddenly he knew.

Sam the clean-up man was waiting to take the car from Leopold when the Captain wheeled it into line at the car wash. "Twice in one week, Captain! The rain really gets 'em dirty."

"Sure does," Leopold agreed, sliding out of the seat.

Sam was halfway in when he saw the nickel-plated revolver lying on the passenger's seat. He hesitated, then looked up at Leopold. "What's this?"

"I think you dropped that, Sam, after you tried to shoot me with it."

Sam cursed and lunged for the gun, but Leopold landed on top of him. They tumbled out of the car together, but Sam broke free and started for the rear entrance, then saw Fletcher and Gibson coming in that way. He turned and ran down the track that carried the cars through the mammoth washing cycle.

Leopold felt the sudsy water hit his face as he pounded after the fleeing man. He caught him with a flying tackle just by the big soft rollers that enveloped the cars. They skidded together in the soapy water, then banged against the hot-air drying vents. Sam made one last effort to break free, but a gush of rinse water threw him off balance. He skidded, went down hard, and then Fletcher and Gibson and Leopold were all on top of him.

"Too much water," Fletcher grinned as he snapped on the handcuffs. "And I thought you liked the rain so much."

Sam glared at Leopold and spat.

"How'd you get me, copper?"

"You were using my gun all the time. I had it locked in my glove compartment and hadn't even looked at it in months. I was wondering who could have stolen it without leaving traces of a break-in, and then I remembered you, Sam. Every week you took the car from me and started it through the wash. It was a simple job of ten seconds for you to remove the bunch of keys from the ignition, unlock the glove compartment, take what you wanted, and lock it again. You could have done it without even shifting your position much behind the wheel. I suppose you did it to hundreds of cars while you emptied their ashtrays and cleaned their inside windows. When you stole the gun from me, that must have given you the idea to go on to bigger things."

"I should have killed you yesterday."

"You tried hard enough. But you also helped give yourself

THE RAINY-DAY BANDIT

away. You recognized my car and broke into a run. Very few people would have recognized my private car, Sam. But of course you knew it well."

"So that's what the rainy-day bandit did on sunny days," Fletcher said as they nudged Sam into the car for the trip downtown. "The car wash was closed when it rained, but you always had to be here working when the weather was good."

Leopold tossed his coat into the back seat. "I'm soaked to the skin, and I still didn't get my car washed. Robbery detail is too wet a business, Tommy. From now on I stick to homicides."



Robert L. Fish

Double Entry

Meet a different Robert L. Fish—at least, a Robert L. Fish different from the one you are accustomed to read in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine. Here is not the irrepressible parodist and punster, the humorist poking outrageous fun at the sacred canon. Here is the other face of the mask, the serious Mr. Fish in a straightforward study of crime—well, perhaps not entirely straightforward . . .

66 I don't like it," George Morton said stubbornly.

There was something almost petulant in his tone, like that of a child being driven to a task against his will. He was a middle-aged, nondescript, balding man, growing too fat. His wrinkled suit bagged at the ankles, bunched itself across his stomach, straining the buttons. He turned from his position near the windows of the swank apartment where he had been staring morosely down at the snow-covered meadows of Central Park, and walked over to the small bar that furnished one corner of the elegant room. He seated himself on one of the stools, frowned across the counter at his host, and repeated: "I don't like it."

His words made no visible impression on the other. Jerry Reed was a tall dapper man with a hairline mustache and an almost military haircut. He continued to carefully measure gin and vermouth into the ice-filled pitcher and then to stir it even more carefully. He slowly decanted the contents into a tall stemmed glass, and smiled. It was a faintly sardonic smile.

"Who said you had to like it?" Jerry Reed poured a glass of beer for his guest and pushed it across the bar together with a bottle of bourbon. A two-ounce shot glass was added to the collection. "Who ever said you had to like any of them?"

He picked up his martini and carried it to the coffee table, lowering himself into an easy chair and holding his drink protectively as he sat. His eyes came up to the face of the man at the bar and he raised his glass slightly.

"Cheers."

"Cheers." Morton poured himself a shot of bourbon, downed it, then sipped at his beer.

"Now, then," Jerry said briskly, leaning forward and setting his partially emptied glass on a coaster on the table. "Why don't you like it?"

"I never killed a woman before."

Jerry sighed. When he spoke his voice had lost its amusement, had turned flat. "When they're dead, they're not men or women any more. They're just bodies. Sexless. Clay. Mud. And you've seen enough of them. And produced enough of them."

"But I never hit a woman before."

"So this time it's a woman. She won't be any less dead for that. Or any deader, either." Reed studied the other man emotionlessly. "You like the money, don't you?"

"Of course I like the money."

"And your wife doesn't think all that nice spendable money just comes from your so-called job as a bookkeeper, does she?"

"My wife doesn't know about the money," Morton said, and reached for the bottle, pouring himself another drink. "I don't even lay out all the dough I earn at the office. She thinks we're broke and I let her think so." His voice was emotionless. "If she knew how much money we really have I'd never get another minute's peace. When it's time for me to retire she'll know."

Reed smiled, pleased to allow the subject to drift from the assignment, satisfied to wait until Morton was in the proper mood. "That's smart. Keep them barefoot, ignorant, and pregnant, I always say."

"Janie never could get pregnant," Morton said absently, and shrugged. "I don't mind. I'm too old to stand the noise of kids, anyway, I guess."

"And how does she feel about your drinking?"

"She doesn't know about that, either. And she better not." The second drink had brought a touch of truculence into the heavy man's voice. Jerry watched him calmly as the glass on the counter top was replenished for the third time and then allowed to sit. Morton always followed the same pattern: the third drink, when finally taken, would eliminate the hostility, bring him back to normal. And Jerry Reed knew from long experience that the alcohol was not to build up false courage. Morton was the best there was. It was simply habit.

"I chew some gum and suck on some drops I've got before I go home," George said, and dismissed the subject, getting back to another statement of Reed's that his present mood rejected. "And don't call it any 'so-called bookkeeping job.' We hire accountants, not bookkeepers. And I'm the assistant office manager down there. It's a real enough job, all right."

"You're also a professional killer," Reed reminded him gently. "Working for me." He smiled, continuing to avoid the subject of Morton's next hit, still waiting for the proper mood to be established. The third drink would do it. The dapper man's tone was idle. "How do you manage to get those afternoons off when you have a job to do?"

Morton shrugged. "The place is owned by my brother-in-law. He probably thinks I'm sneaking out for a dame." He shook his head. "He doesn't care. He only thinks I'm doing it. I know he is." He took his last drink.

"And you never do?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't." The third drink was already working; Morton smiled. "One woman gives me all the grief I need."

He finished the beer, pushed both glasses from him, and swung about on the stool, facing Reed. The last drink had acted as usual; he seemed calm, thoughtful, almost detached. Jerry stared at him curiously.

"So if your wife gives you grief, and she doesn't know about the money, why not just do a disappearing act? In a town this size you could do it right here and still keep doing jobs for me."

"Oh, Janie isn't so bad," Morton said, and then added patiently, "Besides, I told you. I like the job. Old Thomason—he's the office manager now—isn't going to last forever. Two, three years and I ought to be holding down his job."

Jerry Reed studied the fleshy face a moment. It certainly took all kinds! Yet he knew that no professional gun in New York City could hold a candle to Morton. Nor did any other command—and get—as high a fee. He shrugged.

"About the hit—"

Morton was ready. He relaxed against the bar. "Yes?"

"It's Marcia Collingswood."

"What?" Morton sat straighter, surprised. "But why—" He cut the question off as soon as he started it; only his amazement had made him begin to ask it in the first place. The whys were not his

department. "The movie actress? I didn't even know she was in town."

"Well, she is. She's staying at the Hotel Belleville. Room 509."

Morton snorted. "The Belleville? You've got to be kidding! That fleaptrap? Kept dames, quick rentals, and floating crap games—I know the place. That's where I hit Quinleven just last month. Remember?"

"I remember," Reed said dryly. "Anyway, that's where she's staying. Incognito."

Morton considered this. "So," he said at last, simply. "Incognito. Except everybody in the world seems to know where she is."

"Nobody knows where she is. Except you, me, and the man who's paying his good money for the job."

"The Belleville, eh?" Morton considered, then nodded slowly. "Fifth floor . . . Well, that shouldn't be any great chore. When does the curtain go up?"

"Tomorrow evening, between five and six," Reed said.

"Between five and six?" Morton shook his head decisively. "We're doing our annual audit today and tomorrow. I took this afternoon off to come up here and see you, but I told my brother-in-law I'd stay late tomorrow to make up for it. I ask him for tomorrow off, even one minute, and he's going to scream bloody murder." His tone became accusing. "I've just been telling you I've got a job I like and I'd rather not get canned, if you don't mind."

"Tomorrow evening," Reed said with no change in his voice. "Between five and six. She's meeting somebody for cocktails and dinner at seven—or at least she thinks she is—and she's scheduled to fly back to the coast on a midnight flight. But she'll be in her room between five and six, and expecting a caller." He studied Morton calmly. "There'll be a bonus for this one."

The heavy man sighed unhappily. "I'll have to say I'm sick, which means I can't even go back to the office afterwards. Which means I'll not only miss the time at the office, but I'll have to catch the seven o'clock train to Jersey. Which also means I miss the bus, and either wait half an hour, or walk. In all this snow—"

"Tough," Reed said evenly, and came to his feet, indicating the conference was over. He stood while Morton climbed down from the stool, walked Morton to the door, waited while the heavy-set man struggled into his overcoat.

"Marcia Collingswood," Reed said. "Hotel Belleville, Room 509.

Between five and six." He didn't give the name under which she was registered; Morton would know her by sight. Actually, the repetition was merely force of habit; George Morton, he knew, had the information stored unforgettably in his mind. He smiled at the heavy man in friendly fashion. "If you make it close enough to five you might still catch your regular train."

"Not a chance," Morton said mournfully, and opened the apartment door. "You ever try to get a cab up near the Belleville at that hour? Even in good weather? Not a hope." He shook his head dispiritedly, and closed the door behind him.

George Morton glanced at his watch and nodded. The smoke-filled bar a block down from the Belleville was infinitely more comfortable than the freezing weather outside—the bar was too warm, in fact, since he was standing, one foot on the rail, still wearing his overcoat. But then, he wasn't being paid to be comfortable. He picked up the small change before him, finished his beer, and moved toward the door.

It had begun to sleet heavily when he emerged. Morton smiled faintly. Good! True, he would have greater trouble getting to the station afterward, but at least in this kind of weather heads were bent against the driving wind, eyes buried in coat collars, minds preoccupied with their owners' discomfort rather than the faces of strangers. And, too, the Belleville suited his purpose better than any other hotel he knew. Privacy being the sole reason for the hotel's continued existence, and hence propriety, the lobby and desk were around a corner from the entranceway, and both the staircase and self-service elevator could be reached without a person necessarily being seen.

Morton paused before the entrance, under the canopy flapping in the icy wind, and glanced through the heavy glass of the swinging doors. The immediate vicinity of the elevator was deserted; the door of the small cab was open, electrically awaiting custom; the light streaming obliquely from it added to the weaker illumination of the corridor.

Morton nodded in satisfaction, pushed through into the area, and stepped quite routinely into the empty elevator, pushing the button for the sixth floor. If one considered walking a flight a necessary precaution, George preferred it to be down rather than up.

The door slid shut; the cab slowly began its whining climb.

Morton removed his gloves, opened his overcoat, and brought out a revolver from one jacket pocket and a silencer from another. He carefully screwed the silencer into place, stuffed the lethal assembly into his overcoat pocket, then pulled one glove on. His bare hand was placed into the pocket over the gun, hiding its projection. It made one side of his coat bulge suspiciously, but he knew that the only person who might possibly notice would be in no condition to report it.

At the sixth floor the elevator paused, considered, and then allowed its doors to slide jerkily open. Morton stepped out quite naturally, moving down the hallway with assurance. There was nobody to be seen. From behind most of the doors there was an almost watchful silence, but he did not allow this to disturb him in the least. The other rooms projected muffled music from cheap radios.

Morton pushed beneath the red light illuminating the entrance to the stairway, trotted down the uncarpeted stairs, his face calm and assured. He paused at the fifth-floor landing, glancing through the small glass window set in the upper part of the door. Like the sixth floor, the fifth was also deserted; he was not particularly surprised, nor did he allow it to detain him. With a nod he thrust the door aside and walked with confidence to the door marked 509, rapping on it evenly, loud enough but not too loud, with aplomb. Confidence was everything. It removed suspicion from his victims until it was too late; it added to his anonymity in case he was ever noticed. Confidence, but not overconfidence . . .

The door opened. Instantly he recognized the woman facing him, although in person, without makeup, she appeared much older than her publicity photographs. He spoke quickly, before she could recover from her evident surprise at the strange face.

"Miss Collingswood? I'm from the *Daily News*. Chamberly is my name. We heard that you—"

The surprise and disappointment had disappeared; her face had turned hard. "You heard what? What are you doing here? If I wanted to see reporters I wouldn't be staying at this—this—"

She clamped her jaws shut, starting to close the door. It caught on his heavy shoe, wedged in the opening.

George Morton was extremely apologetic. The important thing was that nobody appear from another room, or from the elevator, before he gained entrance.

"Look, Miss Collingswood, we're a newspaper. I've got an editor who eats reporters alive. When a good story breaks—"

"Take your foot out of the door. Do you hear?" Her white face studied his for a moment and seemed to see something in it. She came to a decision. "If you don't I'm going to call the desk and have them send a policeman up here. And if you print one word about my being here, I'll deny it and sue your newspaper for more money than it's got. Do you hear? Is that clear?"

The foot remained. "Look, Miss Collingswood—"

But the girl had had enough. She marched to the small table beside the bed, swinging about to hide the sight of him, reaching for the telephone. Morton stepped inside, closing the door quickly behind him. Her hand didn't have time to raise the receiver; he shot her through the nape of the neck, and then once more slightly higher, even as the body was crumpling helplessly to the bed. The only sounds were the coughs of the silencer.

Morton unscrewed the silencer, put the gun in one jacket pocket and the silencer in the other, and walked to the door, pressing his ear against the thin panel. He didn't even look back. He could hear no voices; he straightened up, buttoning his overcoat, slipping on the other glove. He opened the door slowly, calmly, walking out and carelessly closing it behind him. The elevator was in use, the pointer moving. He walked to the stairway, backing into the door to open it, and then trotted down the steps.

The entranceway was empty when he made the last turn at the final landing and descended to the street level. He stared through the glass with a frown. The sleet had stopped beating down, but the hazards of walking were evident in the figures lurching past. The seven o'clock train? He'd probably be lucky to make even the eight o'clock!

He pulled his coat collar up over his ears and pushed his way to the street. A thin figure, face hooded in a fur collar, hunched in the protection of the doorway, partially blocked his passage. He pushed past and then heard the familiar voice.

"Hello, George."

He swung about, staring, and then smiled in unbelieving amazement. Whatever had brought Janie to the city that day, she couldn't have picked a better time, because no matter where she went, Janie always drove. So she'd have the car, and, slippery or not, a car was always better than walking. His smile suddenly faded. Janie? Here?

"Janie! What are you doing here?" A further question came to him, disturbing, inexplicable. "And how did you know where I was?"

"Because I followed you here about a month ago when I called you at the office and my brother said you were going to be away for the afternoon." Her voice was spiteful, scathing. "I followed you from the office when you left. And when I called to talk to you today and my brother told me he was fed up with your taking time off, I knew where you were. Do you understand? *I knew!*"

She stared up at him, her thin face almost wolfish. "I know what kind of hotel this is. You think I'm a fool, but I know what goes on here—"

"But you don't understand, Janie—"

She fumbled in her purse as for a handkerchief; her hand emerged with a small gun. Morton stared at her incredulously. She raised the weapon evenly.

"*I said—I know—what kind—of hotel—this is.*"

Her words were soft although half strangled, punctuated by the sharp splat of the gun. Morton's eyes had widened in amazement at the sight of the weapon; now they suddenly squeezed closed.

Two bullets drove him back inexorably, relentlessly; he struck the glass doors leading into the hotel as if in relief for their support, collapsing, sliding slowly down to the small step before the entrance, then leaning sideways as if resting against the doorjamb, lifeless.

She moved to him, bending over the rigid figure with its grotesquely open mouth, oblivious of the tableau of startled spectators frozen in their tracks by the sight, oblivious of the shrill whistle from the corner of the street and the figure of the policeman running toward her, sliding, slipping; oblivious of everything but her all-consuming bitterness and her recognition of her failure as a woman. The revolver dangled from her hand, unnoticed, like an admonishing finger, scolding.

"And you've been drinking, too," she said, and suddenly began to cry.

"Q"

Lawrence G. Blochman

Missing: One Stage-Struck Hippie

The return, after much too long an absence, of Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist and director of laboratories at Pasteur Hospital, Northbank, U.S.A., and his assistant, Dr. Motilal Mookerji, and Lieutenant Max Ritter of Northbank's Homicide Squad . . . a view in depth of those of the younger generation, circa 1969, who were "infatuated with the disillusioned, the dispossessed, the bewildered" . . .

And now, to quote Dr. Coffee's assistant, "the criminous enigma of lady with poisoned hair" . . .

Detectives: DR. COFFEE

Northbank lay gasping under the prickly, suffocating blanket of August. As the Northbank police station was not air-conditioned, the doors to the squad room and the office of Detective Lieutenant Max Ritter beyond were wide-open, courting any vagrant breeze.

Ritter did not hear the stranger come in. When he looked up, the apparition already loomed in the doorway. The Lieutenant blinked and looked again. The apparition was still there. Implausible though it certainly seemed, it must be real.

Although the man was as tall as a basketball center and as broad as an All-American lineman, his dimensions did not strike the detective until second glance. Ritter's first impression focused on one fanatical eye gleaming above a fierce tangle of red beard. The other eye was smothered by long caroty hair combed on the bias across a bulging forehead.

Lucite buttons as big as silver dollars glittered on his emerald-green shirt. His denim trousers might have been sprayed on, and his Javanese sandals were bright with gilt. He carried a corduroy jacket over one arm.

Ritter swallowed. His Adam's apple bobbed in his long throat.

When the bobbing had stopped he asked, "Can we help you, buster?"

"I sincerely hope so," said the apparition. The resonant, cultured voice emerged from his garish jester's rig like a bass organ note from a tinny harmonica. "I'm desperately in need of assistance in tracing my fiancée."

Lieutenant Ritter smiled sadly but tolerantly as though to say: errant fiancées are two for a quarter around here, but we'll do our best. "Missing Persons," he said, "is just down the hall."

"Yes, I know. I've just come from there. They've been very helpful. Checked the hospitals and that sort of thing. But they don't share my conviction that Phyllis has met with foul play. This is the Homicide Bureau, isn't it?"

Ritter nodded. When he saw that the apparition was on the point of sitting down, he stood up, but he was too late to move the extra chair out of the line of airflow from the buzzing fan. He was pleasantly surprised when the expected New Left effluvia did not materialize.

"What makes you think baby doll has been given the works?" asked the detective. "Did she, to coin a phrase, frequent unsavory characters? Did she smoke pot or sniff glue or roll drunks?"

"Please." The red beard advanced halfway across Ritter's desk. "Can I hope to convince you that I'm deadly serious? My name is Brown—Tiberius Brown. My home is in San Francisco. My fiancée's name is Phyllis Emerson."

He fumbled in the pocket of his jacket and produced a Kodacolor snapshot which he dropped in front of Ritter. "She came to Northbank about six weeks ago. She wrote me every other day until suddenly, about ten days ago, her letters stopped coming. I wired her. No answer. I tried to reach her by telephone—unsuccessfully."

Ritter studied the photo. It was a full-face shot of a girl with straight blonde hair that dangled to extreme length on both sides of her head. She wore a baby-blue turtleneck sweater and earrings like something by Calder out of Brancusi. The detective was puzzled by what seemed to be conflicting traits in the girl's face: sensual lips and a stern, determined chin; wistful blue eyes and an imperious tilt of the nose; the dreamer and the activist; the romantic and the aggressive realist.

"Why would anyone want her dead?" Ritter asked bluntly.

"I can't imagine." Tiberius Brown spread his hands. "But why

should she stop writing? Where is she?"

"Maybe she left for Hanoi or Havana or some place like that," said Ritter. He didn't smile. Neither did Tiberius Brown, who shook his head vigorously.

"She would have written me," he said.

"Did she have any connection with Northbank's boy militant who got himself arrested in San Francisco a few months ago for raising hell and inciting to riot on the campus of Farwestern University? Simon Gallick. When he got out of the clink he came back here and married a screwball heiress."

"Everybody at Farwestern knew Gallick, of course. But Phyllis was not the political type."

"Look," Ritter said. "Begin at the beginning. What was Phyllis doing in Northbank? Why did she leave the Coast without you? And who the hell are you anyhow?"

Tiberius Brown seemed to swell with dignity. His red beard rose to point directly at Ritter as he leaned farther across the desk.

"I have told you that my name is Tiberius Brown. I am an instructor in Elizabethan and Restoration drama at Farwestern University in California. I am also director of the Dionysian Little Theatre in San Francisco. I've—"

"And Phyllis Emerson was a student of yours?" Ritter interrupted.

"She was registered in my course on Wycherley and the Restoration dramatists, yes. She was also one of the Dionysian Players."

"Was she living with you?" Ritter was again blunt.

"We've been very much in love for more than a year."

"Why don't you get married then?"

"We agreed to wait until I had my Ph.D. There's no future in an academic career without a doctorate, and I'm still working on my thesis."

"But she loved you—was nuts about you?"

"Definitely."

"Then why did she hightail it to Northbank without you? Why didn't you come with her?"

"I was giving a summer course at Farwestern while writing my thesis."

"You still haven't told me what she was doing in Northbank."

"Haven't I? Well, she was offered bit parts in the summerstock

company here. She's crazy about the theater, so she came."

"Who made the offer?" Ritter asked.

"Don Sutherland. He's director of the summer playhouse here."

"Doesn't Sutherland know where she is?"

"No. He says she was ailing and dropped out of the cast last week."

"Like how? Was she on acid or something? Maybe she was having withdrawal symptoms."

"Nothing like that. Sutherland said she was having nauseous spells during rehearsals. He thought it was just nerves or the hot weather. Then she stopped coming around."

"And he didn't check when she didn't show?"

"He called the hotel where she was supposed to be staying and was told she was not registered. The Northbank Hilltop. I got the same answer. Apparently she just went there to write me on the hotel's stationery. You can understand now why I'm not only apprehensive but desperate."

Ritter nodded. He picked up the photo of Phyllis Emerson and studied it again. "You still don't give me a reason why anybody should want her dead," he remarked, "but maybe I can dig up one on my own. Where can I reach you, Professor?"

"I'm at the Hilltop—just in case she should turn up there. I would appreciate any help, Lieutenant."

"Keep in touch," said Ritter. "I'll keep this snapshot."

He got up as the bearded giant strode through the squad room and watched him start down the stairs.

"Brody," he called to a detective who had looked up from his two-finger typing of a report (in triplicate) to stare at Brown. "Stay on his tail." Ritter pointed. He spoke in a stage whisper. "Hilltop Hotel."

Although Ritter told himself that Tiberius Brown's fears for the life of a kook like Phyllis Emerson did not really make the girl a prime concern of the Homicide Squad, the interview had somehow left him with an uneasy feeling. Something about the person and personality of the Bearded One didn't ring true, even though it was not strange that a junior pundit of Restoration Drama (whatever that was) should take on the protective coloring of the querulous generation. He was not completely surprised, therefore, when Brody called in forty minutes later to report.

"I lost him, Chief. He didn't go to the Hilltop Hotel like you said. He headed for Southbank first thing, and I lost him in the

bridge traffic. I got his license number, though. He was driving a rented car, and the rental people say he gave his address as the YMCA, not the Hilltop. The Y people say he's not registered there either. Want me to call in the Southbank cops?"

"No. Come on in."

That settled it. Inasmuch as homicide in Northbank was in the summer doldrums for the moment, Ritter decided to invade the province of the Missing Persons Bureau. If his hunch proved wrong, nothing was lost. Slipping the Kodacolor image of Phyllis Emerson into his pocket, he drove to the Northbank Summer Playhouse which was housed in a deserted schoolhouse just outside of town.

He found Donald Sutherland waving his arms at two eager but slow-witted actresses on the schoolhouse stage. Sutherland was an exceedingly pretty young man. His carefully waved golden hair rippled back from a broad unruffled brow. His smooth pink cheeks dimpled when he smiled. The way his bell-bottomed candy-striped trousers clung to his posterior could only be described as callipygian. His gestures were extravagant and fluttery as he directed the rehearsal, yet he was not even perspiring. He interrupted the scene to answer the detective's questions.

"Yes, of course I know Phyllis Emerson. Good heavens! I hope nothing has happened to her."

"That's what I want to know. When did you see her last?"

"Let's see now . . . four mornings ago. She'd been feeling seedy for several days before that. I told her to go see my doctor. She didn't go, though. I called the doctor. I called her hotel, too. No answer. She may have gone back to the Coast."

"Think she was well enough to travel?" Ritter asked.

"Oh, I think so. Probably just nerves and the hot weather. She's pretty high-strung—like a lot of stage-struck kids who have more ego than talent."

"Why'd you hire her if she's no good?"

"Oh, she's not all that bad. She's adequate for walk-ons and bit parts, but I did *not* hire her. She offered to come with me for the summer at no salary—just for the experience."

"I hear her fiancé came to see you," said Ritter.

"Fiancé?" Sutherland frowned.

"Professor Tiberius Brown of Farwestern University."

"Oh, him!" The smile was not even lip-deep.

"Is Brown a phony?"

"I wouldn't say that exactly, but he's not really a man of the theater either. Of the library, rather. He smells of old books. He's wandered into the wrong century, I think—he belongs to the Seventeenth. He tries hard to live in the Twentieth, but he's miscast. He can't create the illusion. He's just a ham in a costume play."

"But Phyllis Emerson goes for him?"

Sutherland shrugged. "I wouldn't know. I've never inquired into her private emotions. Now if you'll excuse me—"

"Just a minute. You said you tried to telephone Phyllis. Where?"

"At the Hilltop Hotel."

"Brown says she's not registered there."

"She's registered there all right, but not under her own name. She doesn't want her family to come and drag her home. I promised I'd keep her secret, but since you're from the police . . . Just ask for Ellen Terry or Minnie Maddern Fiske or Adrienne Lecouvreur."

"I'll do that," said Ritter.

Dr. Daniel Webster Coffee, chief pathologist and director of laboratories at Pasteur Hospital, squinted into the twin lenses of his binocular microscope and made small clucking sounds as he twisted the focusing knobs.

"Dr. Mookerji," he called, "will you come here and look at this section of a bile duct? I'm sure you've seen plenty like it in India."

Dr. Motilal Mookerji, rotund resident pathologist, Calcutta's gift to Northbank, waddled across the laboratory. Flicking the tail of his pink turban over one shoulder, he sat down beside his chief. His plump brown fingers moved the tiny rectangle of glass under the nose of the microscope.

"Quite!" he said. "Clonorchiasis. Am wagering deceased was G.I. Joe. Yes?"

"Yes," said Dr. Coffee. "Home a year from Vietnam. He shouldn't have died. If whatever dumbbell treated him had sent the lab the proper specimen, we'd have seen eggs by the thousands. Then we could have told his doctor to clean out the trematodes with gentian violet instead of treating the poor guy for infectious hepatitis. True, we never used to see these liver flukes here in the Middle West, but with three-quarters of a

million troops eventually coming home from Asia, doctors all over the country had better learn to be on the lookout for about fifty kinds of tropical parasites they never saw before . . . Oh, hello, Max."

Lieutenant of Detectives Max Ritter had made an unannounced entrance into the pathology lab. Ritter felt very much at home in the laboratory, for he had for years considered Dr. Coffee as his private medical examiner. Northbank was still burdened with the coroner system, in which the coroner, an elected official, was always more skilled in politics than in forensic medicine. Ritter unceremoniously parked himself on a corner of Dr. Coffee's desk, pushed his dark felt hat to the back of his head, and saluted with a casual wave of his hand.

"Hi, Doc," he said. "Hi, Swami." He pulled a sheaf of dog-eared envelopes from his pocket. "I got problems."

"More felonious homicides, no doubt," said Dr. Mookerji.

"I ain't sure," said the detective, "but I could do with some advice. It's this way." And he started to outline the strange story of the missing stage-struck hippie, her disappearing red-bearded fiancé, and the dimpled, golden-haired director of the summer playhouse.

"I checked at the Hilltop Hotel where Phyllis Emerson is registered as Adrienne Lecouvreur who they tell me died two hundred years ago," he said. "The desk clerk is new and never saw the gal, but the manager let me in her room. Nobody seems to remember when she's in it last, but one thing is sure—when she leaves it, she doesn't expect to be gone long. Her feathered mules are still under the bed, her see-through nightgown is still hanging on the back of a chair, and her toothbrush is still in a glass in the bathroom. But no sign of Phyllis."

"What's all this got to do with pathology, Max?"

"It's like this," Ritter said. "The gal quit Sutherland's troupe because she got sick. In the mornings. When I get into her room I find a couple of doctors' names scribbled on the cover of the phone book." He consulted the back of an envelope and read off two names. "Would one of these M.D.'s just happen to be an abortionist, Doc?"

The pathologist glanced at the envelope. "They're G.U. men, so I have no doubt that both have at some time done a therapeutic abortion. But they're also reputable physicians and neither would risk his license to perform a clandestine D and C. Still, she might

have tried. What does she look like, this girl?"

The detective produced the Kodacolor snapshot. Dr. Coffee studied it for a moment, then phoned each of the doctors. Neither remembered a girl answering Phyllis Emerson's description coming in for a consultation.

"My advice to you, Max, is to have this picture copied and give it to all the newspapers," Dr. Coffee said.

The picture of Phyllis Emerson was in all the morning editions, blown up to two- or three-column size. It was also on the early morning television news in living color.

The phone calls were already coming in when Max Ritter reported for the morning shift. Nearly half the calls were from cranks—the usual quota of exhibitionists who are drawn to a front-page story like maggots to cheese. The other calls were from people honestly trying to be helpful, and these required patient legwork to check out. Because a news photo has a tendency to impose its own features on a remembered face, all leads wound up in dead ends—until noon.

"Homicide. Lieutenant Ritter."

"Hi, Max. This is Jerry Fry, Southbank. Remember me?"

"Sure, Jerry. Haven't seen you since we worked together on that WAC murder. What's on your mind?"

"I think I got a make on that gal you're looking for—the one in the morning papers."

"Phyllis Emerson?"

"Yeah. I saw her three-four days ago getting out of a cab on this side of the river."

"You sure?"

"I'd bet on it. She was on her way to the Love Farm—the Gallick place. Know where that is?"

"Who doesn't? Look, Jerry, that's outside my jurisdiction, but I'm coming over anyway to smell around. If I need help I'll send up a smoke signal."

Ritter had never set foot on the Gallick "Love Farm," he reflected as he drove toward the War Memorial Bridge, but he was familiar enough with its denizens who often crossed the river to burn draft cards or join protest marches. The "farm" was the creation of Mrs. Zona Billworth Gallick, a rebel in mink. She was the daughter of Jonathan Billworth, manufacturer of plumbing fixtures, who made his first million pioneering the non-white toilet

bowl. She could never forgive her father for having become filthy rich exploiting the hypocrisy of a society so ashamed of its natural functions that it surrounded them with a phony self-conscious beauty.

Zona's embittered filial protest took the form of spending as much of his ill-gotten gains as she could on relevant causes, such as buying an abandoned farmhouse across the river and converting it into a communal pad for Northbank's hippies and yippies. As a further protest against the Billworth bowls in pastel shades, she refused to install indoor plumbing in the old farmhouse. Her love children got along with the original outhouse in the backyard.

Zona's crowning act of defiance of Papa Billworth and his obscene millions was her marriage to Simon Gallick, the campus extremist. Gallick had become a fledgling revolutionary when he was thrown out of Northbank University in his sophomore year. The charges against him were threefold. He had been caught cheating in an Elementary Russian exam. He had flunked resoundingly in nine hours of credits—political science, economics, and American history. He had been apprehended by campus police while planting cannabis sativa in the Dean's flower garden.

Max Ritter had seen and heard Simon Gallick in action. While he considered the young man a physical mess, he had to admit that the punk possessed a peculiar perversive charm—perhaps pervasive and persuasive as well as perversive. His high-pitched voice rose, in his most hortatory moments, to heights of demagogic frenzy. His harangues were as rich in emotion as they were empty of substance, but he could make New Left clichés sound like pearls of wisdom. And he flitted (at Zona's expense) from campus to campus and coast to coast, like a wandering dervish strewing tacks on the seats of learning—until, after his latest incarceration in San Francisco, Zona (who was terrified of flying) bailed him out, brought him home, and married him.

There was a chain across the access road to the Love Farm. Ritter dropped it and drove up to the front door of the dilapidated farmhouse. Zona had not done much rehabilitation. Paint was peeling, shutters hung at crazy angles, cardboard and tar paper patched broken windows. The arid soil was knee-deep in weeds, but paper flowers garlanded the front door. A Vietcong flag hung limp on the hot steamy air.

In the front yard half a dozen fat girls and gangling young men

were busy painting signs, obviously in preparation for picketing that week's state convention of the American Legion which was to be addressed by an Assistant Secretary of Defense. Two were modeling an Uncle Sam with bloodstained hands. The group stopped work and stared at Ritter.

Ritter strode through the hostile hippies and made straight for the barn, where a red Jaguar was parked next to a black Cadillac adorned with psychedelic symbols. He looked inside the cars, then climbed a ladder to the hayloft. Nothing. The long-haired boys and ratty-looking girls were clustered about the foot of the ladder when he came down.

"You pig!" screamed one of them.

"I'm a police officer," said Ritter. "Where's your high priest?"

Silence.

"I'm looking for the Gallicks."

"They're not here."

"A lie. That's Zona's Cad and Simon's Jag over there."

"They don't talk to pigs," said a barefoot fat girl.

"They'll talk to me."

"Better put on your helmet. Si's in bad humor today," said one.

"Where's your mace?" another demanded.

There was a chorus of rude lip noises and one-syllable words as Ritter walked toward the farmhouse. The noise brought the Gallicks to the front door.

"What do you want?" demanded Zona. She was a tall gawky girl, but her skinny thighs did not deter her from wearing jeans that were scarcely more than a faded blue-fringed G-string. Her tussah silk blouse was properly grimy, but the Ban the Bomb medallion that dangled from the end of her Sicilian amber love beads—an inverted trident of rubies in a circlet of platinum-mounted diamonds—had been made to order by Cartier's or Tiffany's. She wore huge violet sunglasses that hid half her face like a wrap-around windshield and made her buttonhole mouth seem even smaller than it was.

"I'm looking for a blue-eyed blonde named Phyllis Emerson," Ritter said. "I understand she's here. I'm a police officer."

"Wrong again, pig," said Simon Gallick, releasing Zona's hand to step forward. He was nearly a head shorter than his wife despite the extra inches supplied by his hair which rose in a sooty fright wig. His face was weasel-like and the upside-down crescent of a tired dark mustache drooled dismally around the corners of his

mouth. His walk was the standard slow-motion lope of his kind, hands slanted into the front pockets of his levis as though caressing his lower abdomen. "Nobody here by that name."

"Take a look at this." Ritter unfolded the front page of a morning paper.

Gallick shook his head. Zona, looking over her shoulder, said, "We've never seen her."

"Let me refresh your memories. She came here in a taxi a few days ago. She's from California."

"She's not here."

"Mind if I go in and look around? Or shall I dig up the cabbie and get a search warrant?"

"Go ahead and look," Gallick said. "Or do you want to throw in a few tear-gas grenades first?"

The detective walked in. He gingerly traversed several rooms on which mattresses and rumpled blankets were heaped on the floor. Trailing a noisome odor to the rear of the house, he found that the kitchen had been converted into a laboratory for the manufacture of stink bombs, probably to greet the Assistant Secretary of Defense. When he opened a cupboard door, a kitten-sized rat jumped out, knocking over several cans and then scurrying silently away. He climbed rickety stairs, poked into dark corners, opened doors, and discovered nothing more than another rat.

"Satisfied, pig?" Gallick said when he came down.

"No," said Ritter. "I've seen better sties."

Zona let out a string of epithets.

"Now, now. Be nice, or we'll keep the TV cameras away from your next demonstration."

"See you from the barricades"—followed by another sequence of epithets.

"A pleasure," said Ritter, grinning.

He hurried from the house while he could still control his itch to take a poke at the Love Farm's leader. He was streaming, physically and mentally, as he strode through the tall weeds. Suddenly he stopped, bent to investigate a gleam of reflected sunlight that had caught his eye. He picked up a lucite button as big as a silver dollar. He turned it over. A few green threads clung to the under side.

He hesitated, started to turn back, changed his mind. When he reached his car he switched on his radio and ordered an all-points

broadcast for the Thunderbird that Tiberius Brown had rented.

Ritter had scarcely returned to his desk when his phone rang.
"This is Dan Coffee, Max. I've been trying to reach you for more than an hour. I think I've located that blue-eyed blonde."

"You think? You're not sure, Doc?"

"Well, she's here in the hospital, but she's not blonde."

"You mean she's dyed her hair?"

"I mean she hasn't any hair. She's bald."

The startled sound that Ritter made could have been a bark.
"Has she been scalped, Doc? Or was she wearing a wig?"

"She's been poisoned, Max, and I'm afraid she's in pretty bad shape. Better get right over here in case she has a lucid moment."

Ritter went through six red lights with his siren going all the way to Pasteur Hospital.

"Am I too late?" he gasped as he charged into the pathology lab.

Dr. Coffee shook his head. "She's hanging on, but she's in shock and in a coma. She can't talk."

"Think she'll make it?"

Again the pathologist shook his head. "They've given her stomach lavage and tried chelation with dimercaprol, but—"

"Hold on, Doc. Translate."

"My tentative diagnosis," said Dr. Coffee, "based on the loss of hair, is selenium or thallium poisoning. Thallium, which is the more probable, is a heavy metal. When metallic ions are inactivated by some other substance, the process is called chelation. That's what was tried. I'm afraid however, that her body had already absorbed more than a toxic dose. As little as one one-hundredth of an ounce can be fatal."

"Let's go back, Doc. How did she get here?"

"I understand that emergency got an ambulance call this morning from the Northbank Summer Playhouse—"

"From a guy named Don Sutherland?"

"I think that was the name."

"Why in hell didn't he call the police?"

"I wouldn't know, Max. I'm just a pathologist, remember. He told the ambulance intern that when he came to the theater this morning he found the girl lying on the stage near the footlights. She was comatose. She had been vomiting on the proscenium and this man—Sutherland?—thought she had been sleeping off a

drunk until he noticed blood in the vomitus. Then he called for an ambulance."

"Sounds fishy to me," Ritter said. "Or don't you think so?"

"That's your job, Max. My primary interest is in identifying the poison so that I can keep her alive, if possible. Luckily the ambulance intern brought me a sample of the vomitus, and Dr. Mookerji is doing a chemical analysis now. It's a complicated affair, though, and will take several days. Meanwhile I'm getting a spectrographic analysis from the lab at Northbank University. They have the equipment, and it's much quicker."

"What am I supposed to do in the meantime?"

"You know your own routine, Max. Keep in touch with me, and—" The phone rang. "Pathology," said Dr. Coffee. "Yes, Doctor . . . I see: Just now? . . . Okay, I'll get authorization for an autopsy." He replaced the instrument with great deliberation. "Max, Phyllis Emerson is dead."

"Do I get a John Doe warrant for homicide?"

"I doubt very much that it was suicide. It's such an unpleasant, messy way to die. Does she have family?"

"On the Coast. I'll pass the word."

The Missing Persons Bureau of the San Francisco police department was very much interested in Ritter's telephone call. Phyllis Emerson had indeed been on their list for weeks. Her parents hadn't reported her when she first disappeared. They thought she had simply gone off on one of her periodic demonstrations to prove that she belonged to another generation and was beholden to no one. They weren't worried. She had left home before, but had come back after hoeling up for a week or so in the Haight-Fillmore district.

"When we couldn't locate her there, we sent out queries to Los Angeles, Chicago, New York—all the hippie meccas. We never thought of Northbank."

"Did her parents say anything about her possible love life?" Ritter asked. "Wasn't she supposed to be engaged? Did she have any boy friends?"

The voice at the other end of the transcontinental line gave a cultured chuckle. Its owner was probably a recent graduate of the Criminology Department at Berkeley. He chose his words carefully. "According to her father, there was no romantic attachment, but of course the parents are always the last to know. Phyllis Emerson, said her father, was heart-loose and

fancy-free. Her only love affair was with her generation. She was infatuated with the disillusioned, the dispossessed, the bewildered. I'm sure her father will fly out as soon as I give him the bad news."

"Try to hold him until after the autopsy," Ritter said, "so we can get the girl a wig. She was poisoned bald-headed. Call me if you dig up anything."

He had scarcely finished his conversation when the phone rang.

"You the fella looking for that blonde cutie who had her pitcher in the papers this morning?" a man's voice asked.

"I was," said Ritter, "but we've found her."

"Oh. Then you tell her when she comes back to pick up her stuff that she owes me three bucks for cleaning up the mess in her cabin."

"Who's this speaking?"

"I'm Sam Tullinger, manager of the Riverside Motel out on River Road and Garfield."

"I'm afraid Miss Emerson won't be back, Mr. Tullinger—"

"Emerson? She registered as Minnie Fiske."

"Same gal, I'm sure. Have you cleaned up the cabin yet?"

"Not yet. I just looked inside when I seen her pitcher. She wasn't there."

"Then don't touch a thing. Don't let anybody in the cabin. I'll be right out," Ritter said.

He took off as soon as he could assemble a crew of technicians. He knew the Riverside Motel, having, with Dr. Coffee's help, once solved a particularly diabolic murder there. The motel had changed hands in the interim, the former manager having been the last man to die in the electric chair before the state abolished capital punishment.

Sam Tullinger, the present manager, was prepared to be uncooperative until Lieutenant Ritter paid the three-dollar cleaning fee out of his own pocket.

"What about the rent?" Ritter wanted to know.

"Miss Fiske paid a week in advance."

"Mrs. Fiske died thirty-odd years ago. Miss Emerson just died today. When did she rent the cabin?"

"Two-three days ago. Want the exact date?"

"Later. Who brought her here?"

"A taxi."

"Nobody with her? No man?"

"Nope. She was alone when she come in."

"No men came to see her while she was here?"

"I wouldn't know. I don't play Big Brother to my tenants."

"You never noticed a man with a big red beard?"

"I said I mind my own business. I—now wait a minute. Last night a hippie type with a red beard and a green shirt drove up in a Thunderbird while I was looking after some Legionnaires. He started to get out of the car, then changed his mind and got back in and drove off."

"Did he have a girl with him?"

"I didn't see nobody else in the car. This guy with a beard acted drunk to me, but I didn't pay too much attention. We been pretty busy these days with the state Legion convention starting tomorra."

"When did Miss Emerson—or Fiske, as you call her—leave?"

"I wouldn't know. I didn't know she was gone when I saw her pitcher in the paper. Then I went down to look in Cabin Fourteen and she wasn't there. So I called you."

Ritter accompanied Sam Tullinger to Cabin Fourteen where the photographers and fingerprint men were already busy. He noted the meager store of staples in the kitchenette and the few dirty dishes in the sink. The bed was unmade. There were no bottles or cosmetics in the bathroom, but there was evidence on the floor that the occupant had been sick on the way to the bathroom. He was only mildly interested in the cheap plastic suitcase—empty, of course—but he was fascinated by the tufts of long blonde hair strewn about the place—on the pillow, the back of a chair, on the floor.

Ritter collected the hair into a neat bundle which he gave to the chief of the technical squad to deliver to Dr. Coffee at Pasteur Hospital.

On his way back to police headquarters the detective mused that while the pieces were beginning to fall into place, there were still too many pieces missing.

The phone was ringing when he walked into his office. State Highway Patrol was on the wire. "We just found that rental Thunderbird you're looking for," said the trooper at the other end.

"Good. Where? Southbank?"

"No, just off Lilac Lane. That's a side road runs into Interstate Seventy-five north of town."

"Anywhere near the Summer Playhouse?"

"About half a mile."

"No sign of the driver?"

"Nope. Car was wrecked. Left the road on a turn and smacked into a tree. Blood on the windshield and an empty bourbon bottle on the floor. You sending your lab men out?"

"It's your backyard," Ritter said, "but I'll come over just to watch you boys work."

Half an hour later Ritter was watching but saw little he considered significant. There were, as he expected, a few coarse red hairs clinging to the bloodstains on the windshield. There were also what appeared to be dried drops of blood trailing footsteps that crossed the road and disappeared into the weeds and scrub growth. Troopers who had tried to follow the trail farther up the hillside found nothing.

Ritter watched several moulage men spraying shellac on tracks apparently made by a heavy car beyond the spot where the Thunderbird had left the road, as they prepared to make casts of the tire patterns. Then he drove back to Interstate 75 and proceeded to the Summer Playhouse.

Don Sutherland was busy tidying up last-minute details for the evening performance. He repeated for the detective the circumstances of his finding the dying Phyllis on the stage, but he could offer no explanation of her presence there. He was the last one to leave the night before, near midnight, and she was certainly not there then.

No, Sutherland said, there was no sign of a forced entrance. He was sure he had locked the front door when he went home, but someone must have left the stage door unlocked. No, he had not seen Tiberius Brown since the previous day, dead or alive. He offered to escort Ritter on a backstage tour to satisfy him that there were no corpses or near-corpses concealed in the scenery or dressing rooms. There were none.

On his way back to town Ritter realized that he hadn't eaten since breakfast. He stopped at a roadside diner and had two rare hamburgers and coffee.

Ritter was waiting in the pathology lab next morning when the Drs. Coffee and Mookerji came up from the basement carrying Mason jars and enamelware pails.

"What gives, Doc?" was the detective's greeting. "Developments?"

"Some," the pathologist replied. "At least we know that the late Miss Emerson did not patronize an abortionist, legal or otherwise, as you suspected."

"You mean I'm a bum diagnostician, Doc?"

"No, no, Max." Dr. Coffee chuckled. "You were quite right in guessing the cause of her morning sickness. But her pregnancy was not terminated. In fact, she was about two months along."

"That long?"

"Yes. Is it a clue?"

"Offhand," said Ritter, "it practically eliminates Sutherland. I'd say Phyllis wasn't his type anyway—or any other girl."

"Another thing. The spectroscopist at Northbank U. came up with the characteristic bright green line that confirms my diagnosis of thallium poisoning. Now the most probable and most easily accessible source of thallium would be rat poison containing thallium sulfate. I seem to remember there is some sort of restriction on the sale of this. Give me a few hours and I'll have some information that will narrow the field when you start looking for the man who sold it. So—"

Dr. Mookerji interrupted. "Phone for you, Lieutenant." He passed the instrument to Ritter.

"Speaking. Oh, hello, Brody . . . You did? Where? . . . For the love of—he is? Still passed out? No, look. It may not be just booze. Better bring him over to Pasteur. Sure. The emergency entrance."

Ritter turned from the phone. "One of my suspects just turned up," he said. "Tiberius Brown. Missing since Wednesday. Just staggered into a barber shop, asked to have his red beard shaved off, and passed out in the barber chair."

"Drunk?" Dr. Coffee asked. "Or an injury?"

"I don't know." Ritter shrugged. "The barber told Brody he stank of whiskey, but he had a nasty gash on his forehead. He also had a pistol in his pocket, so the barber called police. I told Brody to bring him here for diagnosis. Okay?"

"Why not? We'll intercept him in Emergency."

Tiberius Brown might have been a refugee from the Augean stables when he was carted into the Pasteur emergency ward. His magnificent beard, still unshaved, had accumulated so many leaves and other extraneous rubbish that it was as untidy as a sparrow's nest. He had not only slept in his clothes but had wallowed in them. Ritter was happy to note that one lucite button

had been torn from his emerald-green shirt.

Dr. Coffee guided the admitting intern in making a differential diagnosis of Brown's coma. Was it concussion or merely alcoholic? After ten minutes of tests they concluded that the patient was suffering from complete exhaustion, lack of sleep, emotional trauma, and the remnants of a cataclysmic hangover. A nurse was summoned to give Tiberius Brown a cold bath, intravenous caffeine, and a few whiffs of oxygen.

Half an hour later the Bearded One opened his eyes, sat up, blinked, then fixed Ritter with a dismayed stare. "You!" he said. "I knew it would be you!"

"You're under arrest, Brown, for carrying a concealed and unlicensed weapon and for—"

"I know, I know." Brown closed his eyes again. "For murder. I killed her all right. Poor Phyllis! Okay, I'll go quietly." He held out his arms for handcuffs which were not there.

"Why have you been lying to me?" Ritter demanded. "Why have you been handing out phony addresses? What did you have against that girl, anyhow? Your fiancée, my eye! Missing, my foot! You knew where she was. You knew—"

"Ah-ee-ee-ee-ee!" The red beard parted in an agonized cry that ended in a fit of sobbing. When he had pulled himself together, Brown said softly without looking at anyone, "Yes, I lied. Had I told you the truth Phyllis might still be alive. But no, I had to be the big hero, the knight in shining armor who alone would rescue the princess in distress. True, she was never my fiancée. Phyllis didn't give a damn for me, but she knew how crazy I was about her and she used me when it suited her. I lied when I let you think I'd been living with her."

"Then who was?" Ritter demanded. "She was two months' pregnant."

"I wouldn't know." The Bearded One shook his head bewilderedly.

"Guess."

"Well . . ." Brown swallowed hard. "Logically, and I am not logical at this moment, I should say it was someone she followed to Northbank."

"Like who?"

"Don Sutherland."

Ritter executed five cynical ha's in perfect rhythmic succession. "You must be kidding," he said.

"I lied when I said he offered her a job. *She* offered to join *him* without compensation."

"You really think Sutherland could make her pregnant?"

"Oscar Wilde could and did beget children, despite the Marquess of Queensbury and his son."

"Why did you go to see Gallick on Wednesday?"

Brown winced. "You're very clever at your trade, Lieutenant. Let me tell it my way. I'd been to see Sutherland to upbraid him for luring Phyllis to Northbank. He laughed at me. He suggested it was more likely that Phyllis had followed Simon Gallick. I didn't believe him."

"Why not?"

"I was sure he was diverting suspicion from himself. Furthermore, he seemed more Phyllis' type. She was a true hippie in the original sense. The flower child. Gentleness and love. Withdrawal from society, not revolt against it. Phyllis was not at all militant."

"But she did know Gallick when he was making trouble out there?"

"Everyone did. He saw to that. But as far as getting involved with him—" Brown shook his head. "Incredible."

"So you went to see Gallick on Wednesday," said Ritter, "and he had you thrown out?"

"Forcibly. How did you know?"

"I found one of your buttons in the weeds at the Love Farm. Torn off. Did he deny knowing Phyllis?"

"He said he couldn't remember the names of every coed who fought for the privilege of sitting at his feet."

"Why did you give me the routine of being frantic about the gal's disappearance when you knew she was at the Riverside Motel?"

"I didn't know it then, I swear," said Brown, mopping his brow. "I lied when I said she wrote me twice a week. I had only one letter from her. And then this telegram. I should have showed it to you. It read, 'Ty dear I'm in trouble. Please come to Northbank. Look for letter general delivery. Philomela.' That was my pet name for her. She hated it."

"When I saw you I'd been to general delivery. There was nothing. After my encounter with Gallick I was desperate. I dropped in at a bar and had a few drinks. Then I went back to the post office. There was a letter for me, with postage due on it."

Someone had apparently dropped it in a box without a stamp on it. The envelope bore the return address of the Riverside Motel. Inside there was just a scrap of paper on which were two words: 'Help. Ty.' I went out to the motel and found there was no Phyllis Emerson registered."

"Didn't Sutherland tell you that she was using names like Ellen Terry and Minnie Maddern Fiske?" Ritter asked.

"Sutherland wouldn't tell me the right time. I believe he is allergic to professors of classical drama. In a word, Sutherland does not like me."

"What did you do when you were told the girl was not registered?"

"I had a few more drinks, I'm afraid," said Brown. "I worked myself into a state of great indignation, high courage, and firm resolution. I then bought a bottle of bourbon and a hand gun, which you have confiscated. I returned to the Riverside Motel. The lobby was still crowded with Legionnaires with potbellies and ridiculous garrison caps on their bald heads. I couldn't break through the mob. I was about to drive off when, at the end of the row of cabins, I saw a man helping a woman into a car. It was dark. I couldn't swear the girl was Phyllis, but the resemblance was certainly close, even at that distance."

"So you followed them?"

"Yes. The car turned north on Interstate Seventy-five, which convinced me that the man driving was Sutherland—the road leads past the Summer Playhouse. The driver must have seen that I was following, because he speeded up and took a side road in an effort to shake me off. He knew the road better than I did. I missed a turn and crashed into a tree."

"That was Wednesday night," Ritter said. "This is Friday morning. Where were you all day yesterday?"

"I'm not sure." Brown dug his fists into his eyes. "I managed to stagger uphill into the trees before I passed out on Wednesday night. I must have slept around the clock. It was dark when I awoke. I had no idea what time it was. Somehow I made my way to Sutherland's theater. It was deserted. I thumbed a ride into town. The driver had his radio on, and I heard the news—that Phyllis was dead. I jumped out at the first stoplight and got drunk all over again."

"This morning I decided to quit playing the hippie. I would revert to being a square—get my beard shaved off, throw away

my masquerade, and rejoin my generation from which I had temporarily seceded in the hope of pleasing Phyllis. In that, too, I apparently failed."

"Pretty glib," Ritter said. "Don't you wish half of it was true? Because I'm holding you on the weapons charge while I check every damned thing you've been telling me."

"Max, I've got to get back to the lab and read today's surgicals," said Dr. Coffee, breaking his long silence. "When you've finished the homework I've laid out for you, why don't you round up your cast of characters and bring them up to my lab—say, at five this afternoon? I'd like to kibitz. I might even help a little."

Lieutenant Ritter had a busy schedule after leaving the hospital. First he booked Tiberius Brown on the weapons charge. He next deployed a dozen detectives to canvass pharmacies and hardware stores for information on buyers of such thallium-sulfate-based pesticides as Dyratt and Pestkill. He had Zona Billworth Gallick's Cadillac towed to police headquarters for a thorough examination and vacuum cleaning. The Jaguar—Zona's wedding present to Simon—was no longer at the Love Farm. Neither were the two Gallicks.

When picked up, the Gallicks were casing all probable sites for television cameras at American Legion Hall so that their planned reception for the Assistant Secretary of Defense would get maximum exposure. They were, of course, indignant at being interrupted.

Don Sutherland was indignant too, but he came quietly.

When the last of Ritter's perspiring candidates for a first-degree murder indictment had found a seat in the laboratory, Dr. Coffee spoke.

"All this may seem somewhat irregular to you," he said, "but the circumstances are not exactly usual. I asked Lieutenant Ritter to bring you here because Phyllis Emerson died in this hospital, and I have certain medical findings bearing on her death. You are all in some way a part of Miss Emerson's past."

"Not I," Zona Gallick interrupted. "I never laid eyes on her, living or dead."

"Your husband has," said Ritter. "That makes you a member of the club, too."

"What the hell club are you talking about?" Gallick demanded.

"The Damn Liars Society," said Ritter. "Mrs. Gallick says she's

never seen Phyllis Emerson, but a Southbank police officer sees the dead girl getting out of a taxi at Mrs. Gallick's so-called Love Farm. Professor Brown is lying his head off since Wednesday morning, but is he lying when he says Don Sutherland drove Phyllis away from the Riverside Motel on Wednesday night? We got evidence that Phyllis was at the motel, all right, and Sutherland can't explain how she gets to the stage of his theater, passed out and baldheaded, to start dying."

"You might at least tell us what she died of," said Zona Gallick.

"She was poisoned," said Dr. Coffee, "by thallium sulfate almost surely obtained from rat poison."

"I can't think of anybody stupid enough to swallow rat poison without a struggle," Sutherland broke in. "It must be pretty nasty. Even Phyllis would balk at that."

"She might not have," said Dr. Coffee, "if somebody had told her she was taking an abortifacient. She was eight weeks' pregnant, you know, and there are indications she was seeking to terminate her pregnancy. In that case she might very well have held her nose and taken anything that she was told would solve her problem."

The pathologist paused. The silence was broken only by the hum of the air conditioner and the rustle of people shifting in their seats. He continued, "It has been relatively easy to locate the source of the rat poison that killed Phyllis Emerson. In 1965 the U.S. Department of Agriculture banned the interstate shipment of thallium-based pesticides for home use because of an increasing number of cases of accidental poisoning of children. However, the Department made no effort to recall old stocks on the shelves of retail outlets until prodded by a Congressional Committee four years later—last month, in fact. So Lieutenant Ritter had relatively few stores to canvass before finding those still selling thallium sulfate pesticide. Max?"

Ritter got up and opened the door leading to Dr. Coffee's private office. A wizened little man in a seersucker suit emerged, blinking through thick spectacles as he smiled at the group.

"Mr. Stone is a pharmacist who owns a drug store on Taft Avenue," Ritter said. "Do you see any of your customers here, Mr. Stone?"

"Only one," replied the old man, squinting at each face in turn. "The lady over there." He pointed at Zona Gallick. "She bought the last six cans of DyRatt I had in stock. Just last week."

"Of course I buy rat poison." Zona was on her feet. Crimson flooded her cheeks. "And with good reason. The farm would be overrun with the filthy beasts if we didn't keep the rodent population explosion under control. I repeat, I've never seen the dead woman in my life."

"Where were you on Wednesday night, Zona?" asked Ritter.

"None of your business," snapped Zona's husband.

"Oh, stop it, Si. It's no secret. I was addressing a meeting of the American Legion Auxiliary, trying to persuade the women to join our anti-war demonstration against the Assistant Secretary tomorrow."

"Did you drive your own car, Mrs. Gallick?" Dr. Coffee asked.

"I—no." Zona turned suddenly to stare at Gallick. "Si needed the big car that night."

"I had to pick up some signs and banners and other heavy protest material that wouldn't fit in my Jag," said Gallick.

"I bring this up, Mrs. Gallick," the pathologist continued, "because Lieutenant Ritter has been exploring the upholstery of your Cadillac with a vacuum cleaner this afternoon and he has brought me a handful of long blonde hair."

"So what?" Zona's cheeks were losing color. "We have many fair-haired friends."

"I'm sure you have," said Dr. Coffee, "but this particular hair was once Phyllis Emerson's, no doubt about it. You see, thallium has the peculiar property of causing human hair to fall out. It also has the property, when ingested, of being absorbed by all tissues of the body, including the hair. The hair found in your car has been shown by photospectrographic analysis to contain thallium. Likewise, the hair lost at the Riverside Motel. Likewise, on the stage of the Northbank Summer Playhouse."

"Are you implying, Doctor, that my husband transported this woman to or from a motel while I was addressing the Legion wives?"

"The evidence indicates that one of you did."

"But why? Why?" Zona's cheeks were chalky white.

"In your own case, Mrs. Gallick, you may have wanted to remove a threat to your marriage."

"Don't make me laugh, Doctor. Do you think Si would jeopardize his marriage, his career, and his whole life for some fawning little trollop from nowhere?" She glared at her husband who seemed to shrink visibly.

"You said it, Zona baby," said Max Ritter. "Your Si knows which side his bed is buttoned on. He wouldn't stop at a little thing like murder if he thought a trusting little girl he'd made pregnant was going to come between him and your old man's millions."

"Don't listen to that dirty fink, Zona."

Zona had not stopped staring at her husband. "Si," she said, "did you? With that little tramp? Not that I really care, of course—"

"Of course not," said Gallick.

"In the interests of justice," said Dr. Coffee, "I'm going to propose a little scientific experiment. Dr. Mookerji here will take a few drops of blood from each of you gentlemen, and then—"

"What for?" Sutherland asked.

"A paternity exclusion test," said the pathologist smoothly. "I've already typed the blood of the late Miss Emerson. She is type O. Now by comparing the blood types of possible fathers with that of Miss Emerson's unborn child, we may be able to exclude all you gentlemen from the responsibility of having been the sire. For example, since Miss Emerson was an O, and if the unborn child has AB blood, any one of you three who has type A, B, or O is positively excluded. Any objection, Professor Brown?"

"None whatever."

"And you, Mr. Sutherland?"

"Will it hurt?"

"No more than a pinprick."

"Okay then."

"You can go to hell!" Simon Gallick shouted before Dr. Coffee could put the question to him. "Not one drop!"

"But, Si," said Zona, "if this test will put a stop to these silly accusations—"

"I know my rights!" Gallick's tiny eyes bulged and his lips were contorted as though he was about to foam at the mouth. "I refuse to give my blood to or for anyone in this stinking society anywhere—here, or in Vietnam or Korea or Northbank or any place. I'll go to jail first."

Dr. Coffee made a helpless gesture with both hands. "Draw your own conclusions, Max. I suggest you get a court order."

"I'm going to hold every screwball of this whole screwy lot as material witnesses," said Ritter.

"Don't start reciting that stupid rigamarole about my right to

remain silent and all that jazz." Gallick stuck out his lower jaw at the detective. "I know it all by heart. Phone your lawyer, Zona. We're entitled to that."

When Ritter and his gaggle of bizarre characters had departed, Dr. Mookerji held out a chubby brown hand to Dr. Coffee. "Felicitations, Dr. Sahib," he said.

"For what, Doctor?"

"You are doubtless preparing paper for medical journals describing unique Coffee method of securing agglutination reaction from blood of unborn embryos," said the Hindu.

Dr. Coffee laughed. "Nonsense, Dr. Mookerji. You know as well as I do that a two-months' embryo has not yet developed agglutinins in its blood. A baby may not even have agglutinogens sensitive enough for testing several months after birth."

"Nevertheless—" Dr. Mookerji wagged his turbanned head twice to the left "—was able to detect overt symptoms of dismay, consternation, and second-degree panic in person of Simon Gallick when asked to volunteer blood sample."

"I hope you noted," said Dr. Coffee, grinning broadly, "that I promised no actual result from an agglutination test. I merely said *'if* the unborn child had AB blood.' I was only trying to inspire the young man with the fear of God—Whom he doubtless doesn't even believe exists."

Dr. Mookerji frowned. "Am somewhat nonplused," he said, "regarding focus of suspicions upon violent young gent with sad mustache when poisonous hairs belonging to deceased were retrieved from motor car belonging to wife. Please elucidate, Dr. Sahib."

"I think it's fairly obvious," Dr. Coffee explained, "that Gallick was scattering red herrings all over the place—assuming, of course, that he's the culprit. First of all, he went to great lengths to keep the California girl away from his wife. I'm inclined to believe Mrs. Gallick when she says she never laid eyes on Miss Emerson, who stayed meekly put in her hotel until she found herself in trouble. When she came over to the Gallick Love Farm for a confrontation with Gallick, Mrs. Gallick was probably not there, and he whisked the girl away to isolation in that motel. The motel also had the advantage over the Hilltop Hotel in that she would be unable to call a house physician when she began to suspect that she might not survive the supposed abortifacient.

"What inspired him to move the girl from the motel to the Summer Playhouse I can only imagine. When she did not die at once, I suppose he panicked and thought that somehow he could implicate Sutherland by leaving the girl to die in the Playhouse."

"Am further nonplused and perplexed." Dr. Mookerji's frown persisted. "You are therefore of opinion that fear of God will impel confession from youthful iconoclast? Or that courts will accept godly fear as legal evidence of guilt?"

"Not at all. But we have reached a point in this case where police science must now take over. Pathology has determined the cause of death, furnished a likely motive for murder, and pointed a way to unmasking the culprit. From here on it's up to Max."

The phone rang as if on cue.

"Pathology. Dr. Coffee . . . You have? Good, Max . . . You did? Fine. Yes, of course I'll testify."

"Lieutenant Ritter has no doubt unmasked culprit?" said Dr. Mookerji.

"Max's technical crew has developed a fine set of fingerprints from Cabin Fourteen at the Riverside Motel. Simon Gallick, standing on his civil rights, refuses to be printed unless charges are placed against him. However, he was printed in California when jailed for inciting to riot at Farwestern. The Henry classification has just been telephoned in, and the match is perfect."

The Hindu resident beamed. "Am greatly gratified," he said, "that native land has contributed to solving criminous enigma of lady with poisoned hair."

"Really?" Dr. Coffee smiled with tolerant disbelief. "And what, may I ask, is India's contribution to this case?"

"Both essential and copious," replied Dr. Mookerji. "Fingerprints first used to trap felonious wrongdoers by Sir William Herschel while Calcutta police functionary in 1877. Furthermore, classification system just cited by San Francisco was invented by Sir Edward Henry while Inspector-General of Bengal Police at turning of century. Okey doke?"

"Okey doke," said Dr. Coffee. "I'll inform Lieutenant Ritter of his debt to Bengal."



Robie Macauley

The Barrington Quality

A perfectly delicious story, told with grace and charm, by an author whose work has appeared in "Playboy," "Esquire," "Vogue," and "Cosmopolitan" . . .

Joshua Barrington, founder of the old and honorable London house of that name, would undoubtedly have been hanged by the neck until dead if he had fallen into the hands of George Washington. He was a printer turned sergeant in the army of General Sir William Howe, and in 1776 he took on the job of defeating His Majesty's rebellious subjects by counterfeiting huge amounts of the paper money issued by the colonies. It was one of the earliest attempts to destroy the value of the dollar through massive inflation and Joshua deserves to be remembered as a pioneer in the field.

Fortunately for the cause of liberty, however, he was a conscientious craftsman of high standards. His fake continentals were printed on a good, thick grade of English paper with excellent engraving and presswork. The colonials immediately recognized them as counterfeits—the bills were obviously so superior to their own wretchedly printed legal tender. Thus Joshua barely escaped hanging by General Howe and thus, out of failure, the famous "Barrington quality" was born.

The second Joshua, who inherited a small unprofitable printing house in Hammersmith, early showed promise as an artist-engraver in a rather florid style. One day in the 1820's, as he pondered on his bad fortune, a simple but remarkable scheme for making money occurred to him. He immediately closed down his shop and began on a private project. Six months later he packed a large sample case and a small portmanteau and set out to visit all the backward countries he could locate on his map of the world.

On the paper currency of the ensuing period there is a great profusion of heraldry, allegory, and calligraphic flourish. When

postage stamps appeared in the 1840's, there arose a demand for heroic portraits of kings, princes, presidents, and generals. Bonds and stock certificates called for an enormous amount of arabesque, scrollwork, decorative border—plus cornucopias, temples, and overweight ladies in trailing, diaphanous gowns.

The expansion of finance and the busy creation of still more backward countries brought new markets for these impressive pieces of paper. Barrington's flourished. If anyone could make a one-eyed bandit of a general look like the Emperor Augustus, Barrington's could; if anyone could make a country composed of nomads, goats, and 70,000 acres of rock and sand appear to be heir to the glory that was Greece, Barrington's could.

The second Joshua's son and successor was knighted as Sir Kenelm Barrington. In time he became the master of a large house in Kensington, a yacht, a fine stable of horses, an estate in Surrey, a wife, six children, and a villa in St. John's Wood where lived his little friend, a girl with the sweetest face and trimmest pair of legs in London. To the printing house Sir Kenelm added a private mint which turned out excellent coinage for all those unpronounceable countries at the far ends of the earth.

The firm had become a solid institution by the end of the century when Sir Kenelm finally passed on to that better place where, it is said, large ladies in Grecian dress float about playing on musical instruments and dispensing dividends of 35%, paid in gold. His oldest son succeeded to his wealth and dignities, became Sir Maurice, and, in the course of natural events, the father of a lovely girl.

She was born about the time the Germans were being so difficult, and just about the time when both the Empire and the house of Barrington began to feel a chill wind from over the sea. Somehow the overblown symbolic figures, the gilt edges and the arabesques, had started to decline in popularity. Primitive countries bought their own printing presses and began to turn out their own ill-favored currency and hideous magenta-colored stamps. "On the theory," Sir Maurice used to say, "that what may become worthless may as well look worthless." Too often beautiful engraving and heavy parchment had failed to inspire confidence in a government whose treasury reserves were gone.

By the early 1930's, Barrington's was in deep trouble. Its best customers of former days had either escaped by the back doors of their palaces or had been marched out the front to firing squads

in the courtyard. Sir Maurice haughtily refused several orders that called for stamping the portraits of usurping scoundrels on some cheap new alloy. Finally, baffled, he began to devote most of his time to hunting and fishing, and he left the grand old firm to crumble slowly under the management of his director, Judson Turbid. Stout, pink-faced gentlemen, sitting over walnuts and port, shook their heads sadly when the name of Barrington came into the conversation.

Now, lunching at the Savoy, stopping with friends on the Riviera, sipping after theater at Rule's, or playing tennis at a long-weekend houseparty in Bucks, Lucretia Barrington had no hint of this: Being lovely and being pursued by several rich young men and several poor young men of good family—that took up practically all her time. Despite the fact that Lucretia bought her clothes in Paris, had once appeared as a minor character in a novel by Mr. Evelyn Waugh, and had gone hiking in Scotland quite unchaperoned, she was a most respectable young lady. Sooner or later she would select and marry some worthy young man who was as much like a Barrington as possible.

Then an odd thing began to happen:

First with the poor young men—they no longer asked her to dance or to go riding with them in the park. Then, one by one, the rich young men stopped telephoning. A titled suitor who had proposed to her four times, both drunk and sober, suddenly married the fat daughter of a famous distiller. Lucretia put it down to pure thirst. Then there were two left, and finally just one. But, since that one was a young man with many solid virtues—he was the son of a poor but honest baronet—she'd always had him in mind as an eventuality. In fact, there was something of an understanding between them.

One day he asked her to lunch at Scott's.

"Peter, what's wrong with you? You keep smoking cigarettes instead of eating your scampi."

"Er—well, I'm afraid it's something sticky I must tell you. Promise not to be hard and bitter."

"You've forgotten your money and I'll have to pay the bill."

"I wish that were all. It does have to do with money though, worse luck. You see, I'd hoped to ask you to marry me. But, as you well know, I haven't a penny."

Lucretia laughed. It was the prettiest sound that had been heard in Scott's for months and quite a few people looked up from

their plates to see who was so happy. "You dear old imbecile. I have enough money for both of us. Why, Barrington's print it by the ton."

"I don't mean silly drachmas or pengos or whatever. I mean sterling."

"But I have lots of that, too."

Peter looked down at his hands and didn't speak for some time. "I'm afraid the point is that you haven't. For you to marry someone as poor as I am would be madness." Finally he had to tell her what all the world knew about Barrington's. Lucretia turned pale, gave a little shudder, and began bravely to talk about the yacht show.

She cabbed to the house in Kensington, took a sleeping tablet, and went to bed. In the middle of the night she woke up. In her sleep the thought had come to her: I must marry a ruthless scoundrel.

She waited for a few minutes and then the perfect solution came to her: Martin Chance. She took another tablet and went back to sleep.

As a matter of fact, Martin was the only real scoundrel she knew. He was a handsome young man whose plausibility and polish were well-known around gaming tables and in certain bottle clubs familiar to the police. There was a Canon Chance living in Yorkshire who, when asked about Martin, would reply dourly, "I no longer have a son of that name."

The first time Lucretia had met Martin, she had thrown a glass of gin-and-french into his face because of something he had done under the night-club table. The second time, they exchanged rude remarks. Martin seemed to be attracted to her. She now decided to use him as a weapon to restore the greatness of the house of Barrington.

In a very short time Lucretia had engineered another meeting. During the next few weeks thereafter, she could be seen with Martin in any number of low places—the racecourse, French casinos, Greek restaurants in Soho, and some of the more sinister night clubs. Gradually a number of curious changes took place in the two of them. Martin began to drop his sneering, sarcastic tone. Lucretia found herself, at times, using some bloody awful language she'd picked up here and there. Martin began to worry about whether she might be seeing other young men. Lucretia learned to enjoy gambling and soon lost £50 on the horses and

nother £50 at roulette. One Sunday, driving back from Hampstead, Martin said a great number of foolish things, ending up with a passionate proposal of marriage.

Of course this was a definite item in Lucretia's long-range scheme. She had planned to marry Martin and train his sharp talents for bigger things. What she had failed to foresee was that he was not nearly so bad as she had supposed, and she was not early so good. What was worse, she had fallen in love. Muddles like this often end up in marriage, willy-nilly.

They eloped—but they might have saved themselves the trouble. Sir Maurice did not notice; in fact, he welcomed Martin with such cordiality when he learned that he was the son of Canon Hance (who had been up at Oxford with one of the Barrington cousins), himself suggested that Martin take a position in the firm, and then went back to snuffing out the lives of fish and birds.

Martin grew a mustache, took a flat in Knightsbridge, took in *the Times*, and made it a point to cut all his old pals. He appeared every morning at eight sharp in the office, to the extreme mortification of Judson Turbid, who always stayed behind to count the money after Martin had left in the afternoon. It was nothing, however, before Turbid had an inspiration.

He would make Martin a salesman. On the one hand, that would take him away from London for long periods of time and, on the other, it would give him something harmless to do. Nowadays a salesman for Barrington's had very little he could possibly fuddle up. Thus Mr. Bede, the single remaining traveling salesman for Barrington's, was retired at the age of 68 to a small cottage in Sussex, and Martin was installed. Very shortly after that, Judson Turbid received a visit from a fat olive-colored little man who introduced himself as the Consul-General of the Republic of an Isidro.

Far away in this little-known country General César Romulo Fuego y Caliente was busy sweeping out corruption and putting an Isidro to rights after the recent revolution. His first act in the way of cultural improvement was to send to Italy for an equestrian statue of himself to be set up in the capital's principal plaza. His second reform was to be a new issue of government bonds and currency. As the consul explained to Judson Turbid, the United States of America, tired of disorder in that part of the continent, had recognized General Fuego as an outstanding patriot and had

granted extensive credits to his new régime. As a result, the new certificates would be worth something more than the paper they were printed on. What was more, the successful bidder for the contract would do very nicely indeed.

When Lucretia heard the news she was quite pleased for a moment and then quite upset. "Oh, Martin, I hope that you won't let any of those Spaniards tempt you back into your old habits!" she said.

"My darling, as you know very well, I'm completely reformed, thanks to you," he replied.

Martin worked long and hard supervising the preparation of samples. When all was ready, Lucretia and Judson Turbid saw him off on the boat train. One of them was imagining his triumphant return with all sorts of success and fat orders. The other was thinking of possible shipwrecks or, perhaps, a sudden counter-revolution in which all foreigners would be lined up and shot. Judson would settle for any luck that would prevent the old firm from falling, at last, into the hands of a cad.

Judson Turbid was also aware of something he had not bothered to tell Martin: Barrington's had not the faintest of forlorn hopes. The San Isidreans had invited several more progressive English firms. A couple of American companies with quite up-to-date artists (they went in for Rockwell Kent-style views of buildings and industrial complexes) were also competing—to say nothing of an odd lot of German, Japanese, and other firms. Judson took a mournful pleasure in knowing all this.

Once aboard at Southampton, Martin got his luggage stowed away in the broom-closet-sized tourist-class cabin and immediately headed for the first-class lounge. Much to his astonishment he discovered Herr Helmuth Trinker (Die Staatspapiere Druckerei, Hamburg), Monsieur Jacques Delaine (Imprimerie De-laine, Paris), and two English engraver-printer representatives engaged in a friendly game of chance.

"*Quelle surprise!*" said M. Delaine, making room for him, "Barenton's is still showing the flag, hein?"

"More than that," said Martin coolly, "we have a new line that will make San Isidro delirious with joy."

"You haf discovered how to crowd even more classic antiquities on the paper?" Herr Trinker asked in a sarcastic tone.

"Exactly," said Martin, "and we've made them so they glow in the dark."

Then, by tacit agreement, they stopped talking business. Many drinks and many games later they saw the coast of the new world come into view over the horizon. They disembarked at a hot and squalid tropical port. After no more than a two-day wait they were able to board a hot and squalid train for San Isidro.

The Grand Hotel Monte-Carlo, San Isidro's best, is situated on a sun-scorched plaza, directly across from the presidential palace. After a brief tour of the town and the worst dinner in living memory they went into the bar and called for the cards. Martin was sitting with Solmson (Imperial Engraving) and Higgs (Marker and Son, Ltd.) and Herr Trinker. After a while they were joined by Delaine, a Japanese, and two Americans. These gentlemen had just returned to the hotel after discovering that all places of entertainment in the city had been temporarily closed down by the revolution. Having played with great luck and skill all during the voyage, Martin now found seven-card stud with almost everything wild too much for him, and he lost heavily.

"I think you got the jitters, kid," said a lean American named Stanley Barton.

"And no vondaire," said Delaine, "all of this boring voyage to no purpose. One may assume that Imprimerie Delaine has the contract in the sack."

"Not so fast, old boy," Higgs said. "Whose designs are taking the Balkans by storm? Not Delaine's. It's Markers', that's whose." A general argument followed. Since there was now no point in keeping any design a secret, they finally agreed that everybody should show his samples. Each one of them seemed to have a desire to overawe the competition—and so Higgs invited them all to his room for whiskey and the viewing.

Higgs was first. He brought out a large wooden case, unlocked it, and folded the two halves back. Lying under glass, on a rich background of blue velvet, his samples were most impressive. The one, five, and ten peso coins glinted sharply. The twenty, fifty, and one-hundred peso notes caught the eye. On a background of flaming oranges and purples the battlefield triumphs of General Fuego were shown in lavish and heroic detail.

"I believe that the skirmish in front of the brewery was the only real military action of the revolution," said the Japanese.

Evidently Mitsayama felt a little encroached on because his own bonds and bills—which were next—were also devoted to General Fuego. The dictator was shown in many noble attitudes:

as a statesman, as a leader addressing the multitude, and as a planner clutching compass and blueprints. They were all very artistically done. The viewers were silent. Finally Higgs said, "You have made him look a bit slant-eyed, you know."

Helmut Trinker's designs tended to brawny husbandmen and strong horses. Then, on the bonds, were shown two muscular pioneers clearing the jungle with ax and machete. The beholders took silent satisfaction in noting that the real San Isidro seemed to be largely cactus and dry, eroded hills.

They caught their breaths when Delaine's samples came out. And for a long time they stood entranced, staring at the delicate curves and the bare bosoms of imaginary Indian girls from San Isidrean history.

At last the company turned, with somewhat patronizing expressions, in Martin's direction. "Well, gentlemen," he said, "truth to tell, Barrington's have stuck by their traditional designs, and there's nothing new to see. Our currency appeals to the basic sense of beauty and proportion instinctive in man—and not to passing whims and fancies." They all took the words as an open confession of defeat.

The next morning they were gathered again in the anteroom of the presidential office. One by one each was called to bring his samples in for the interview. Finally it was Martin's turn. He entered an enormous room, rather bare except for some large oil portraits on the wall. Martin assumed that the vacant places where portraits had been removed indicated corrupt cabinet ministers no longer hung but perhaps hanged. General Fuego was dressed in civilian clothes, but he had a military jaw and a martial scowl as he sat behind his huge uncluttered desk.

"Ah, Señor Shans?" he said. "From the ancient house of Barrington's, no? I hope that your company has moved with the times, no?"

Smiling broadly and doing his best with the sales talk, Martin brought out his small case of samples.

The general scowled harder. "But it is not possible!" he said. "The workmanship she is good, *si*, but the ornaments and the representations, they are so antique, no? Is that the goddess Ceres I see bringing in those sheaves? And we have no Parthenon here, Señor Shans. San Isidro will become a modern country—skyscrapers, income tax, traffic jams, just as in London."

"The thing about bonds and paper currency," Martin said, "is that they should inspire confidence. Make people think of the Roman Empire and all that. Look at this thousand peso note —remarkable likeness of Mars, don't you think?"

"Mars, *si*," said the leader. "But where is Fuego? Not a single portrait of my own self. Ah, well, Señor Shans, all the entries shall be judged by me and the Minister of Commerce. We shall inform the bidders of the result this evening." In lieu of a goodbye he scowled slightly less.

That evening the Minister of Commerce appeared in the hotel lounge. He made a speech in which he thanked all the competitors, one by one, with lavish compliments. Each began to think that he had triumphed. Then the minister announced that Barrington's had unquestionably won the contract. There was a simultaneous gasp.

A happy Martin signed the papers and stood everybody to a drink. The others were shattered, but they were as sporting about it as foreigners can bring themselves to be. "It is the tradition of English solidity. The extreme thickness of that paper," said Mitsuayama.

"Certainement, it is inartistic stuff," said Delaine, "but, unfortunately, that very fact makes it appear to be real money."

Martin's voyage home passed like a pleasant dream. He arrived in Knightsbridge, kissed his pretty Lucretia many times, and telephoned Sir Maurice with the good news. That afternoon the three of them, with Judson Turbid, sat in Sir Maurice's office over celebration sherry. Turbid pretended that he'd never had a qualm.

"In the long run quality always wins," he said.

"Quite," said Sir Maurice. "But I'm curious to know how you convinced the good general. What was your spiel, as I believe it is called nowadays?"

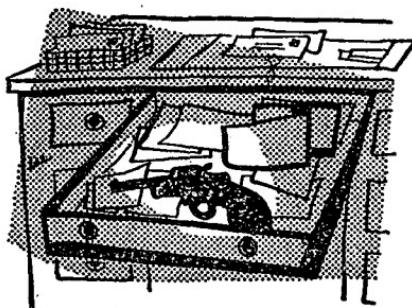
"Oh, the money spoke for me," Martin said. "I'm afraid that I'm hardly very good at hawking things."

"The Barrington quality, of course," Turbid broke in. "The artistic appeal, the fine parchment, the—"

"Actually," said Martin, "the general detested the look of the stuff, as I thought he very well might. So I had prepared a little surprise. Just as the general was dismissing me and saying that he and the Minister of Commerce would judge the competition, I had several large crates of our currency brought in through a side

door. All our rivals, you see, had brought one-of-a-kind samples, but I'd had a few thousands printed up, mainly of the large denominations. It seemed hardly necessary to point out that when the new currency went into circulation, the general would have the good luck to possess the largest personal fortune in the country. All backed by the reliability of the Yankee loan, of course."

Sir Maurice mused a moment. Then he raised his glass in a toast to the portrait of Joshua Barrington on the wall. "Ah, ancestor," he said, "if you'd only had the wit to do the same with that fellow George Washington, the course of history might have been a bit happier."



Michael Harrison

The Clew of the Single Word

another "unknown tale" of Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin

If Monsieur G——, the Prefect of the Parisian police, and Dupin's sometimes fatuous foil, deliberately set himself the task of giving the great Chevalier the most difficult ratiocinative problem imaginable, truly the most taxing deductive test, it would be the case of Colonel Feydeau, suspected, accused, arrested, charged, tried, and convicted of treason of which he was completely innocent . . .

Detective: "C. AUGUSTE DUPIN"

The wind was moaning and shrieking among the chimneypots as we heard G——'s carriage enter our courtyard. It was a wild, gusty night in November, 18— that G—— had answered Dupin's summons to our old mansion, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. All was warm and snug, however, in our little back library or book-closet, *au troisième*, and G—— expressed his pleasure at seeing the glowing fire to which he rushed with extended hands.

"It is true," said the Prefect of the Parisian police, when he had accepted the cup of hot spiced wine that Hyacinthe, our domestic, had brought to him before retiring from the room; "it is true that the evidence upon which Colonel Feydeau was convicted by court-martial was of the kind called 'circumstantial'; but we need not reject it because of that. Simply put, gentlemen, the Colonel was found Guilty in the proven absence of any other possible suspect."

"But there was no motive," Dupin remarked.

"I would not say that there was *no* motive, even though it was never actually brought out in the evidence laid before the court-martial. But, all the same, there is strong presumption that

Colonel Feydeau is disaffected toward the present King. The warmth with which he refused to accept the Cross of July from his present Majesty nearly cost the Colonel a forced resignation; and the words he is said to have used when it was proposed to congratulate the King on his escape from Fieschi's infernal machine led to a duel with General —, who has found it very profitable to support the new *régime*. No, if there has not been positive evidence of treachery, there has been strong evidence of disaffection."

"In that case," said Dupin dryly, "it is most mysterious that Colonel Feydeau should have been the officer chosen to act as confidential Military Secretary at the meeting he is supposed to have betrayed. Why was Colonel Feydeau chosen? The two Marshals of France who met to discuss our country's future must have been satisfied that Colonel Feydeau would not betray his trust?"

G—, in an odiously vulgar gesture, laid a thick finger alongside his nose. To this vulgarity he added a wink.

"Marshal B— and Marshal H— are not notorious for their liking of The Citizen King."

"Bah!" said Dupin impatiently. "That's merely begging the question! Whether or not they like King Louis Philippe, the two Marshals must enjoy the confidence of the present *régime*. Ergo, they would not have appointed a Military Secretary of whose attachment to the present King there could be the slightest possible doubt. Whatever the outcome of this secret meeting at the Ecole Militaire, it is clear that it was begun under no cloud of suspicion. If the two Marshals trusted each other—and were trusted by the Government—then all three must have reposed implicit confidence in the honesty and honor of the Colonel. So much is clear. Why, then, did suspicion fall afterward upon the Colonel? I take it there is positive evidence that the secrets of that secret meeting were betrayed, that there is no possible chance the Colonel is falsely accused?"

"We have positive evidence that most of what Marshal B— and Marshal H— discussed was conveyed, within two days, to the Military Attaché of Prussia, whose King may be accepted as the European monarch most interested in the matters deliberated by the two Marshals of France. Yes, Dupin, I assure you there was a betrayal. Now you will ask me why we are so certain that Colonel Feydeau was the traitor? The explanation is simple: no

one else had either the means to acquire the information or the opportunity to disclose it to a Foreign Power."

"And the motive?" Dupin murmured, puffing away at his pipe, and regarding our visitor steadily through the drifts of fragrant smoke. "And the motive, my dear Prefect, which led this man of apparently indubitable military honor to commit the worst crime in a soldier's code?"

G—— threw up his hands in a gesture most characteristic of him.

"Who can say? That is the most mysterious part of the entire affair."

"You mean that you have failed to uncover a plausible motive? But this is scandalous, my dear G——! The establishment of motive should have been the first consideration."

"In the absence of a proven motive the prosecution was entitled to accept circumstantial evidence of the most convincing nature. That is good law, my esteemed Chevalier."

"True, but to proceed to such a charge without a motive! The Colonel is not in debt? He does not frequent card-parties? He keeps no expensive mistress or—perhaps even more costly—a string of English thoroughbred horses? No? Very well, we shall return later to the question of motive. Pray be good enough now to explain to me the irrefutable proof upon which the Colonel was charged and condemned?"

I have said that the night was a gusty one. As we had been talking, the wind had risen and was now blowing, as the sailor says, half-a-gale. The wind moaned about the ancient roof of our mansion; but above the moaning of the tempest came a higher sound—something between the sharp stridulation of a piccolo and the deep organ-note of a bass viol.

I had observed that G——'s attention had been caught by this singular noise, and that it had been filling him with increasing nervousness and irritation. At the best of times not a patient man, G—— could bear the vexation of this inexplicable sound no longer. Cutting with deliberate boorishness across the even flow of Dupin's patient questioning, the Prefect of the Parisian police held up a hand with the same peremptory gesture as that with which an *agent-de-ville* arrests the traffic in the boulevards of Paris.

"Dupin! Do I require the attentions of the aural surgeon—or is that some excessively singular noise I hear over and above the din

of the storm? It sounds as though all the hobgoblins of legend are wailing on your rooftop!"

My friend smiled.

"What you hear is indeed a singular sound. But reassure yourself, my dear Prefect: you do not need the attentions of a surgeon. Nor, for that matter, of a necromancer. There *is* a sound. It comes from the direction of the rooftop. Demons are not making it—wire stays supporting the ruinous old chimney are responsible. It was necessary to brace the brickwork, and when the wind blows, the wires hum."

"Hum? They shriek. And—forgive my odd fancy, Dupin—but one could almost imagine that these wires of yours are *speaking*. There is—hark now!—something almost articulate in the sounds which emanate from those vibrating wires."

We listened; and indeed it was as though we could distinguish words here and there. I remarked that, perhaps, man might learn in truth to talk along wires one of these days.

"Small boys certainly can," said the Prefect, "when they send paper disks aloft on the strings of their kites—so long, that is, as the strings are kept taut. Dupin, could you not slacken off your wires? They might not then hum so much in the wind."

"They are not as tight as they might be. They are purposely left slack. If one tightened them more, the noise would be insufferable, and the strain on the old chimney would bring the bricks tumbling down."

Monsieur G. sighed and then proceeded to recount the facts on which the Colonel had been condemned to death.

"For some years past, in the interests of the Government, the secrecy of such meetings as that between the two Marshals had been safeguarded by changing the *rendezvous* for each meeting. Sometimes the meeting would be held in a room in the Ministry of War, at another time in a room in the Ministry of the Marine; sometimes in the Prefecture of Police; sometimes in the Ecole Militaire."

"There is no regularity from one *rendezvous* to another?" Dupin asked.

"None. To remove all possibility of a pattern establishing itself, the place of the meeting is drawn by lot. The various names of the *rendezvous* are written on slips of paper, the slips placed in a hat, and a slip is withdrawn."

"A slip might be palmed?"

"I have often made the draw myself. If not I, then someone of equal trustworthiness. Sometimes, to make certain there has been no substitution, I have ordered a second draw, using a different person to make it. You ask me if it would be possible to dig a tunnel to within hearing distance of the room? Well—which room? Even the participants in the meeting do not know until their carriages have drawn up where they are meeting; and as for us, we draw the name of the *rendezvous* only a few minutes before giving directions to the participants' coachmen. But let me explain to you the precautions taken to insure that the meetings are held in complete secrecy."

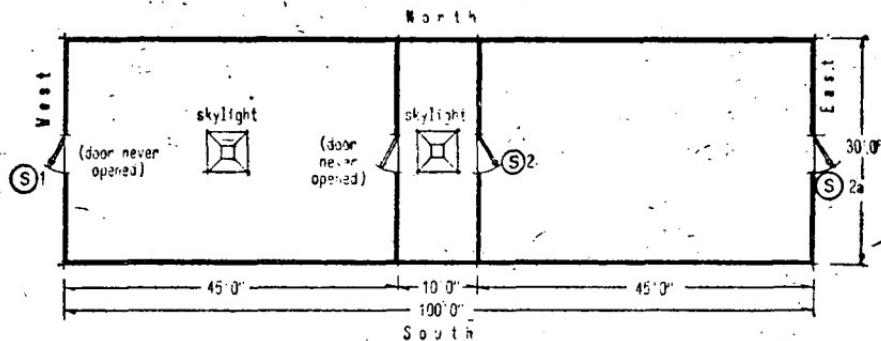
Imagine (G— went on) a rectangle whose four sides we shall denominate, for easier comprehension, North, South, East, and West. Now this rectangle represents a large room, thirty *mètres* in width—that is, between the West and East boundaries—and ten *mètres* in depth—that is, from North to South. We have then, in English measures, a big room about one hundred feet wide by about thirty feet deep.

In the centre of the West wall and in the centre of the East wall there are heavy doors. There are no windows in any walls, but illumination comes from small barred skylights through which not even a dwarf could make his way. To prevent eavesdropping, the skylights are glazed with ground glass, through which it is impossible to see, though, of course, as the glass is translucent, the light of day may penetrate.

Now (G— continued) imagine that, at a distance of forty-five feet from the West wall and at a distance of forty-five feet from the East wall, the room had been divided by two walls parallel with the outer West and East walls into three compartments: two compartments, to West and East, measuring forty-five feet across by thirty feet deep; and one smaller compartment between these two larger compartments—this much smaller room being only ten feet in width by thirty feet in depth.

In the West and East walls of this smaller compartment two doors had been cut and so placed that, if one were to draw a straight line connecting the West and East doors of the original room, this line would pass through the doors of the smaller compartment.

"But," said G—, "perhaps a rough sketch will make the matter clearer." He drew his memorandum-book from his tail-pocket, and with a pencil rapidly completed this plan:



"The position of the central, smaller room, entered by two doors—one to the West, the other to the East—is now evident," G—commented.

"Just so," said Dupin, picking up the sketch and subjecting it to intense scrutiny. "And, save for the skylight you have indicated, there is no other entrance to the conference chamber?"

"None."

"No trap-door in the floor? No hatch in a wall through which food and other things might be passed? Nothing? Just so! And, doubtless, the same applies to the two larger rooms which flank and guard the central chamber? Now, I observe that you have marked the letter S, ringed, on the sketch. This, I take it, signifies the soldier-guards. Were there more than one?"

"Yes. Two. Be so good as to turn again to my poor chart. In the West wall of the central chamber there is a door; in the West wall of the outer room—I mean the room to the left of the central room—there is also a door. Both these doors were closed and double-locked. Outside the door in the wall of the outer room sat a soldier whom I have indicated as S1."

"Sat?"

"Yes, sat. In a chair. Why, Dupin, what is so extraordinary about that?"

"That soldiers sit and not stand is sufficiently extraordinary. Besides, one of the two Marshals of France whom they were guarding has the reputation of being something of a martinet."

"Let me explain. There is no relaxing of discipline implied in the fact that the two soldiers sat, rather than stood at attention. Both are picked men—this special guard is one that they have been mounting for years."

"Indeed!"

"Indeed. Once the *bona-fide* character of a guard is established it would be most imprudent to change."

"Hem!" said Dupin.

"You do not agree? Well, let us discuss that later. To return to the system of guarding the conference, the soldier to the West sits outside two locked doors—locked doors which are never opened."

"Never?"

"Never. Entrance to the conference room is only through the two doors to the East."

"You forgot to explain why the guards sit rather than stand?"

"Ah, so I did! They sit because they have no relief guards. As they may have to wait outside the conference chamber for many hours, it would be an intolerable hardship if they were asked to stand beyond the regulation Army watch of two hours. If they become too fatigued, their attention might be dulled."

"In a comfortable chair their attention, I should venture, might become dulled even sooner. Or perhaps the chairs are not comfortable?"

"If they were supplied to the order of Marshal H—— I should hazard a guess that they are far from comfortable. But that, my dear Chevalier, is why the guards sit, and do not stand. Now let me explain to you the precise routine which is followed at each conference."

"Always the same routine?"

"Always. No variation in the rules laid down some years ago is permitted. Though the *venue* of the meetings may change, the guard-mounting never varies. Even the plan of the room-within-a-room is scrupulously followed."

"Followed, in the case of each *venue*, to the point that the dimensions of the rooms are always the same?"

"To the last *centimètre*. This, of course, facilitates the work of the guards. They know exactly what to do, exactly where to take up their positions."

"I am convinced of it," said Dupin, with a dry intonation which, to both G—— and to myself, betokened a private sense of merriment.

Monsieur G. frowned.

"Dupin, I do believe that you find something amusing in all this! Let me remind you that the honor and life of a French officer is at stake!"

"You do not need to remind me of the gravity of the situation. But, on the other hand, I cannot fail to be amused when *naiveté* puffs itself up to a mere pompous imitation of responsibility."

"What on earth do you mean, Dupin? I—"

"No matter. I see that you have marked S1, S2, and S2a on your sketch. Would you, pray, explain?"

"Gladly. S1 and S2 are, of course, the soldier-guards—Jean-Baptiste Vourc'h and Michel Nettier, respectively. As the doors on the West are never opened, Corporal Vourc'h takes up his seat outside the outer wall; and there remains until ordered to quit his post."

"By whom?"

"By Colonel Feydeau—or whoever is acting as Military Secretary for the conference."

"Colonel Feydeau does not always act as Military Secretary, then?"

"No. Usually the senior member of the conference—there are not always only two—names his choice, and the officer in question is seconded to the conference for its duration. Well, the Military Secretary posts the man to the West—in this last case, it was Corporal Vourc'h—and then, through the outer door to the East, enters the inner room, the members of the conference preceding him.

"The other guard—in this case, Sergeant Nettier—then locks the inner door and for a few minutes takes up the position I have marked S2. Inside the central chamber, the Military Secretary examines the room, paying particular attention to the fact that both doors are locked and that the skylight is firmly closed. As soon as he is satisfied that the security is perfect, he raps on the East door of the inner room and orders the guard—in this case, Nettier—to leave the outer room, lock the outer door, and take up his position on a chair at the point that I have marked S2a on my sketch.

"Here Sergeant Nettier remained until a signal from Colonel Feydeau announced that the conference was over. The Sergeant then unlocked and opened the outer door, and entered the Eastern outer chamber; he then unlocked and opened the Eastern inner door, and stood aside to let the two Marshals and Colonel Feydeau out. That is how the routine goes in every case."

Though "Lights Out" had sounded before we arrived at the

Ecole Militaire, the Orderly Officer for the Night willingly complied with Dupin's request that the clerks on duty when Sergeant Nettier had sat on guard be roused and brought down.

As this was being done, Dupin examined the room that had been set apart for the conference, as well as the flanking rooms, and appeared to pay excessive attention to the hooks from which the bell-cord hung. However, after the most *minute* examination of the Sergeant's bell-ringing device, Dupin looked at us with a smile upon his lips, and something of rueful self-reproach in his expression.

"I confess that, as Monsieur le Préfet complained of the noise of the wind in the wire braces of our old chimney-pot, and further remarked that small boys can send messages aloft on the strings of their kites, I suspected that the Sergeant had contrived that the wire linking this outer door with the inner door—the door of the room in which the two Marshals were discussing the foreign policy of our country—could be so tightened that the vibrations of the Marshals' voices would be carried along to him as he sat silently at his post outside the outer door."

"How do you know that he was silent?" G—— asked.

"I doubt very much that the Sergeant permitted himself—or was permitted—to speak. But we may soon verify my supposition that he was silent. Ah, here come the clerks. You, Monsieur, were on duty as a clerk when this room was being guarded. I believe the non-commissioned officer on guard sat in a chair?"

"Yes, sir, he did. I understand it is usual in such cases."

"Just so. You observed the Sergeant as he sat on guard?"

"Conformably with my duties, sir," said the clerk. "I cannot say that I observed him with any particular attention."

"Of course not. As you say, you had your duties to attend to. But you probably saw what he did? How he passed the tedious hours of waiting? Did he engage you or one of your fellows in conversation?"

"No, sir. From the moment he closed and locked the door until the ringing of a small bell caused him to unlock that same door, he spoke not one word."

"Most commendable! Did you not address a word to him?"

"No, sir. We were on duty. Talking is not permitted. In our ten-minute recesses, we go outside or into the recreation room."

"I see. The Sergeant did not talk. Presumably he did not sleep. What, then, *did* he do? Did he read?"

"No, sir," said the clerk, "he wrote. A table had been provided for him, at his request, and he had ink and paper. He appeared to be writing all the time, save when he broke off for a few moments to drink the coffee that an orderly brought to him."

"Did you, or one of your companions, venture to ask the Sergeant what he was writing? No matter!—I see that you are properly scandalized at the mere suggestion. I must bear in mind that I find myself in a *milieu* strictly military, where one does not ask questions. Yet you *did* observe the Sergeant from time to time?—the exigencies of your labors," Dupin asked, not without a tinge of irony, "permitted you to do that? Very well."

Then, turning to the Orderly Officer, Dupin requested that he be permitted to continue the examination of the military clerk alone—that all, except the Orderly Officer, be sent back to their beds. This being done, Dupin continued his questioning.

"I desire you now," he said, "to describe to us *exactly* what happened when the conference came to an end. Please try to recall every detail, no matter how trivial it may seem to you."

"Well, sir," said the man, after a glance from his superior officer had given him permission to speak, "the bell tinkled, Sergeant Nettier rose from his chair, lifted the writing-table out of the way, and unlocked the outer door, leaving it ajar. Then we saw him walk from the outer door to the inner door and unlock that. He opened it wide, stood well to one side, and after a few moments *Messieurs les Maréchaux*, followed by Monsieur le Colonel Feydeau, came through the inner door and then passed through *this* door. We, of course, sir, all stood at attention, and Monsieur de Barrère here"—the clerk glanced at his Orderly Officer—"saluted. The senior of the two Marshals acknowledged the salute, and the two other officers bowed."

"Then?"

"Then? Well, sir, the three officers—the Marshals leading, and Monsieur Feydeau following close behind—continued on through that door—over there."

"Which leads—?"

"To the Officers' Mess, sir."

Dupin rubbed his chin, staring hard at the clerk, who appeared to be somewhat discomposed under the intense scrutiny of my friend.

"And Sergeant Nettier? Did he join the distinguished party?"

"Oh, no, sir. He went back to lock the inner door, then he

locked the outer door, and then he followed the party after they had passed through that door there, on their way, I suppose, to the Officers' Mess."

"Yes. Now pay the strictest attention to what I ask. You saw Sergeant Nettier go *into* the inner room—?"

"Oh, no sir! He did not go *in*. He merely closed the inner door and locked it. I could see him clearly from where I was still standing at attention by my desk."

"So! Very well then: another question. As the two Marshals came out, was anything said? I mean: did anyone speak? You seem to be in some doubt. *Did* someone speak? *Was* anything said? Were the two Marshals in conversation?"

"No, sir."

"Good. We progress. You saw the faces of these officers clearly? Yes? Well then: was any emotion visible on any face? Joy? Mortification? Stern resolve? You take my meaning?"

"To be sure, sir. But—no. I cannot say that I detected any emotion. These gentlemen, sir, preserve correct military reticence when in public."

"One might argue," said Dupin, somewhat nettled at the implied rebuke, "that these gentlemen were *not* in public. However, you could detect no emotion on any face?"

"Now, this is of vital importance. Was *nothing* said as the party came through this outer door? Ah, you begin to recollect! Something *was* said, eh? By whom? And *what*?"

The clerk frowned, and then his face cleared as memory returned.

"I had almost forgotten. It was just a remark. But, yes, as the gentlemen came through the door and the senior Marshal looked up to return the salute, I saw him staring, as though he had seen a ghost, at something behind me. Perhaps, monsieur, you would ask the Orderly Officer if he, too, noticed it?"

Yes, said the Orderly Officer, he had caught this strange look on the Marshal's face, and it had astonished him.

"What was the cause?" Dupin asked.

The clerk was silent.

"You could not have seen what was behind you," said the Orderly Officer, "since you were standing at attention."

Dupin said gently, "There are grave matters of state involved here. It so happened that this clerk was standing—strictly at attention, of course—but in such a way that he did *just* manage to

see what had astonished the Marshal. You may tell us what it was."

With a dubious glance at the Orderly Officer the clerk muttered, "The door had opened there, and I saw the Marshal staring at one of the corporal-cooks. He was stripped to his waist, but wore his tall linen cap and was brandishing a large ladle. He was so amazed at seeing the Marshal that he stood there gaping, and I saw the Marshal turn his eyes upward, and heard him say something to the other Marshal before they passed out of this room."

"What did you hear the Marshal say?"

"I cannot be quite sure, but—"

"You can—and will—be quite sure!" said Dupin sternly. "Rack your memory and recall *exactly* what was said! Come, you may take your time, but it is of crucial importance that you recall what was said."

"I crave your indulgence, sir," said the clerk, "but I caught only one word. I thought I heard the Marshal say 'sublime'."

"And the sentence of which that word formed a part? Can you remember any thing more?"

"Well, sir, seeing that the Marshal was obviously commenting upon the ludicrous apparition of the half-naked cook, wielding a ladle, and looking like some apprentice of Satan, I assume the Marshal may have remarked to the other Marshal: 'From the sublime to the ridiculous, eh?' Does not that seem possible to you, sir?"

"Bravo!" said Dupin, rubbing his hands with immense satisfaction. "Yes, it does seem possible to me. Now, you say that you caught only the word 'sublime' because the Marshal spoke somewhat under his breath, since he was also gravely returning the salute of this Orderly Room. Could Sergeant Nettier have heard more? Was he nearer than you? Of course he saw, but do you think he heard all that the Marshal said? Perhaps the word 'sublime' rather stood out—pronounced a little more loudly, eh?"

"Perhaps, sir. I only know that I heard but the one word—'sublime'."

We returned to our mansion in the Prefect's carriage by a leisurely route which took us along the Petite Rue des Acacias, through the Place Breteuil, and so along the Rue de Vaugirard to No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain.

Dupin refused the importunities of the Prefect to explain—though he had permitted himself to tell the Prefect to order Sergeant Nettier's arrest.

"I shall explain all," said Dupin, "as soon as we are comfortably ensconced in our little book-closet, *au troisième*."

In a short time we were sitting around the fire, with the meerschaum and two cigars pouring their foggy fragrance into the air and mixing it with the steam rising from three glasses of hot brandy grog. Whereupon Dupin began his explanation.

"First of all," he said, "you are correct, Monsieur le Préfet, when you say nothing can be heard from the inner room by any one outside the outer door. My theory that the bell-pull was a listening device proved untenable. It was simply a bell-pull, and nothing more. No notes were passed. Sergeant Nettier could not hear what was said. He could not even learn, from the blank expression on the Marshals' faces, or on that of Colonel Feydeau, to what conclusion the conference had come. Yet *I* know what decision was made."

"Good gracious, Dupin! What are you telling me?"

"The decision taken by the Marshals was this: should Prussia intervene in Spain, France would invoke her secret understanding with Turkey and supply the Turks with arms and men to move up from Bosnia and Herzegovina into the Austrian territories, causing Prussia to go to the aid of Austria-Hungary which would, of course, be instantly under attack from the Italian rebels. This would leave Prussia with the alternatives of abandoning the Spanish adventure or of gravely extending her commitments over more than a thousand miles of territory, almost all of it hostile to King William."

"Merciful heavens, Dupin! How on earth did you learn this? Who, in the name of all that is holy, gave you this information?"

"The Prussian Government," said Dupin coolly, "through their Military Attaché in Paris."

"But, Dupin!" said G——, his face black with suspicion.

"Be seated! I am no traitor. But if the Prussian had *not* given us correct information, Colonel Feydeau would *not* have been arrested. Eh? Ergo, the information from Prussia *was* correct? Agreed? Yes. Well, now, the information came in the first place from Sergeant Nettier, and not to him from Colonel Feydeau, either. Sit down, G——: the solution is simple. Nettier heard no more than the clerk did—that one word, 'sublime.' He passed it on

to his Prussian paymasters, as he had been instructed and well paid to do. It was not much, to be sure—just that one word, 'sublime.'

"But in all truth it enabled the *experts* of the Prussian Foreign Office to do precisely what I have done—to reveal the decisions on political and military action to be taken by France in the event of Prussia's intervening in Spain. The fact that you arrested, charged, tried, and convicted the Colonel proves that both the Prussians and your humble servant deduced correctly. *There was no information from the conference or from any individual member.* All that Nettier had to report was that Marshal H—had mentioned the single word 'sublime'."

"And what on earth did that tell the Prussians?"

"It told them that France intended to call on Turkey. What is the other, the official, name for Turkey, Monsieur G.?"

"Gracious heavens! Dupin, I should never have associated the word—"

"Nor did the clerk, which makes him innocent of any complicity. He would not have mentioned the word otherwise. But you do see now: Turkey, known as the Ottoman Empire—otherwise, and officially, known as *The Sublime Porte*. That little word unloosed a torrent of shrewd and accurate speculation on Prussia's part.

"But, Monsieur le Préfet," said Dupin coldly, "pray refrain from saying what is springing to your lips—that 'it was all a silly blunder, and really no mystery at all.' That the tragedy we have just avoided came about through a trivial accident, I agree. But would you have seen, in the single word recalled by the clerk, the means of tracking down a spy and of restoring the honors of a French officer, while saving him from a shameful death?"

G— does not often pay compliments; rarely indeed does he pay one to Dupin. But this time his generosity, such as it is, overcame his natural prudence in the matter of acknowledging my friend's superiority in ratiocination.

"Congratulations, my dear Chevalier," he said with a smile, raising his glass in a toast. "Your performance merits only one word—*sublime!*"

"Q"

Helen McCloy

The Pleasant Assassin

Dr. Basil Willing, the former medical assistant to the District Attorney of New York County and the famous forensic psychiatrist and crime consultant, is faced with a contemporary problem in communication—a problem within a much larger problem involving one of today's most important dangers to law and order and to the health of our future leaders. In a word, drugs. Or to borrow one of the author's phrases and use it metaphorically—"a costume ball without masks" . . .

Detective: DR. BASIL WILLING

The high place had been a grassy knoll a few hundred years ago. It still revealed a view of the countryside beyond the city. Once a watchtower had stood here and beacon fires had been lit when the watchers saw Indians. It was still called Beacon Hill.

From his windows on the twentieth floor Basil Willing looked down on the golden dome of the Bulfinch State House. Beyond, he had a bird's-eye view of huddled roofs and chimneypots. Leafy tree tops traced the paths of old streets winding down to the river. Here and there a church steeple stood, sharp as a needle, against an angry sky.

Black clouds had brought on premature twilight. A hidden sunset touched the lower edge of darkness with flame as if all the fires of hell were banked just beyond human vision.

As indeed they are . . . Basil was remembering the clash between students and police on Boston Common the night before.

He could see the Common now as a mass of tree tops on his left. He could see the river beyond the chimneypots. Little sailboats were tacking to and fro in a cluster, as busily unimportant as a cloud of hovering gnats.

His doorbell buzzed. Twenty floors below someone must have touched his button by mistake. No one in Boston knew he was at

this address except his daughter, and she had left him only moments ago. She had not mentioned coming back this evening.

He pushed the button that opened a two-way speaking tube to the vestibule downstairs. "Yes?"

"Dr. Willing?"

It was a man's voice, distorted by the echo-chamber effect of the tube. "My name's Grogan—Aloysius Grogan, Boston Police Department. Inspector Foyle of New York gave me your address. May I come up?"

"Of course."

Basil pressed the other button that opened the door, but he was still puzzled. Foyle had retired to Florida and only came to New York for occasional visits. When, and why, had Foyle been in contact with the Boston Police?

The doorbell rang. On the threshold stood a tall man with a face so young that just seeing it made Basil feel ten years older.

"Frankly, I've come to ask your help," Grogan said. "It's sort of off the record."

"It would have to be," said Basil. "Inspector Foyle is not the only person who has retired lately. I'm no longer a medical assistant to the District Attorney of New York County."

"But you're still called in as a psychiatric consultant."

"Only now and then, but I have no official standing in Boston. I'm here because I was asked to deliver a series of lectures at Harvard. I was glad to accept because it gave me a chance to live near my daughter for a while. She's a student at Wheaton."

"I realize all that, but—" The young man sighed. "When I saw Foyle in New York he seemed to think this was your kind of case. Of course I don't want to impose on you. When a man is old enough to retire he wants people to leave him alone."

"Old? Suppose you tell me about this case."

"Thank you, sir."

Basil's lips were dry. He recalled a remark of his father's: *The worst thing is when they start calling you "sir"* . . .

"You've heard of Professor Jeremiah Pitcairn? Known to students as the Pit Viper?"

"Author of *After the Family: What?*"

"That's our boy. *Brave New World* stuff."

"Stress comes from partial control of environment. Ergo, let's eliminate stress by controlling the environment totally from the

moment of birth. Pavlov could never have got those dogs to salivate every time that bell rang if he'd had only partial control of their environment."

Grogan laughed. "You're not in sympathy with Professor Pitcairn's theories?"

"No, but I really cannot see how they could bring him into conflict with the law."

"I'm with Narcotics."

It took a great deal to startle Basil, but this was a great deal. "A full professor! Pitcairn?"

Grogan sighed. "You see? Nobody's going to believe it. That's his strength. But it's not impossible, you know. Small amounts of mood-changing drugs are accessible to experimental psychologists as to doctors."

"I don't believe it, Pitcairn's much too conservative."

"Is he really? Not if you read between the lines. He wants to change things. He wants escape from conflict. Control the environment of children from birth and they'll escape all conflict with environment. I'd say that's pretty revolutionary."

"It would certainly end progress," said Basil. "For progress depends on some people refusing to accept environment as they find it."

"Who wants progress? Not Pitcairn."

"How do drugs come into it?" asked Basil.

"They can be used experimentally to modify reactions to environment. This enables you to command the reaction you want when you want it, for the length of time you want it, so you can study it at your leisure. But suppose you become so interested in drugs that you decide to try some of them on yourself? Like Baudelaire and Gautier, to say nothing of De Quincey and Coleridge. And suppose you get hooked on an expensive illegal drug. Not just marijuana. Something stronger. What then?"

"You'd need money. Lots."

"A hundred dollars a day or more. Just for the drug. You're a full professor, too smart to take to petty crime, like stealing or forgery. So you go into the business of distributing drugs. You become a middleman, recruiting pushers for wholesalers—pushers who are racketeers. That's profitable and you think it will be safe. Who's going to suspect the distinguished author of *After the Family: What?*"

"But you do suspect him. What happened?"

"Stool pigeons. We've had tips—or shall I say 'information received'? The dope is sea-borne. Pitcairn lives down near Buzzard's Bay and comes up to Boston two or three times a week. He always drops in at one place we're watching—The Den of Iniquity."

Basil couldn't help laughing. "Surely with that name the place must be innocent!"

"You can't be sure. We've just arrested a pair of burglars who specialized in rifling summer cottages while they were empty in winter. Those boys sold everything they stole openly, at a roadside antique shop, and their sign read: *Thieves Market.*"

"You think The Den of Iniquity is another double bluff?"

"I'm sure of it, but I can't prove it. We had a tip that Pitcairn was going to be there last Wednesday. He'd been away for three weeks. India. It seemed logical he'd have stuff to give pushers when he got back—at least, logical enough to watch him while he was at The Den. I really thought we had him."

"But you didn't?"

"He never showed. I had The Den staked out—went there myself. Then I had a bit of sheer bad luck. There I was, trying not to look like a policeman, and the first guy I saw, after I walked in, was someone I'd been to school with, who went on to MIT on a scholarship when I joined the department. He called me by name and asked me how I liked being a policeman. I tried to shut him up but somebody must have heard and warned Pitcairn."

"Why are you so sure it was this incident that gave you away?"

"Nobody outside Narcotics knew anything about that stakeout at The Den. It must have been that dear old school chum of mine who blew my cover, damn him! Whoever overheard him must have telephoned Pitcairn."

"Where is The Den?"

"Charles Street. It's just one big room. Used to be a shop. There's a shop window still, with a curtain across the glass to hide the inside from passers-by in the street. There's a beer and coffee bar, a little dais for musicians, some tables and chairs and lavatories and one telephone booth. That's all. Just two outside doors—a front door to the street and a side door to an alley. People kept drifting in all evening, but no one left the joint until it closed. I know because I was in a position to watch both doors leading outside. That's why I'm so sure someone telephoned Pitcairn from inside."

"Were you able to watch the telephone booth, too?"

"Oh, yes. I was sitting right beside the booth in case a call came through for me from one of the other men in Narcotics. It didn't. There were no incoming calls at all and only two outgoing calls. A girl the others called Anna Warsaw phoned some boy named Sam at Boston University and they had a long silly conversation. No references to drugs or professors. I could hear everything because she left the door of the booth open. It was pretty hot that night."

"My daughter knows an Anna Warsaw. At least she's mentioned the name."

"Students around Boston get to know each other. Boston is just a big village. The name Warsaw is pretty uncommon, so it's probably the same girl."

"How do you know she was calling Boston University?"

"She asked for Mugar Memorial Library."

"At that hour?"

"It's open until eleven thirty. And she just asked for Sam—no surname. So he probably works there."

"And the other call?"

"A boy made that one. The others called him Gene."

"Was his conversation silly, too?"

"There wasn't any. No one answered his call. He waited about a minute, then slammed the receiver back on its hook and came out of the booth. I heard him say to another boy that parents ought to have more sense than to go gadding about at night when they were too old for it, so I assumed that either he was calling his parents or he wanted people to think so."

"And you believe that one of these two calls warned Pitcairn?"

"What else can I think? Pitcairn never showed up, so someone must have got a message to him. No one there left the room or did anything else that could have conveyed a message outside. So someone must have telephoned, but the only two who actually did telephone didn't seem to be passing on a message about drugs or police. So you see, it's impossible!"

"Unless the girl was talking in code, or the boy let the telephone ring a prearranged number of times as a signal. What do you want me to do?"

"Well . . ." The young face got pinker. "We've just had another tip. Jeremiah Pitcairn is expected in Boston again tonight. If he comes it will be the first time since he returned from India."

"And you think he'll visit The Den of Iniquity?"

"He's a regular—always goes there when he's in town. A lot of professors do. Bridging the generation gap, they call it. I can't go myself because I was recognized last time. All the regulars know I'm a cop now. But you've only just come to Boston. No one would recognize you."

"No one would talk to a man my age in a place like that. You need someone who can pass for under twenty-five."

"Students take their parents to places like The Den. It would seem natural if you were there with your daughter and people might talk to you then."

"I think we should leave my daughter out of this." Basil's voice sounded more abrasive than he had intended.

"But she'd give you a good excuse for being there."

"I don't want her involved. The best I can do is to go there alone and look around. I hardly expect anything will come of it, but I might pick up something. How do I find the place?"

"On the west side of Charles Street, halfway between the Common and Cambridge Street. You can't miss it. There's a big neon sign in red that says: *The Den of Iniquity*. I'll give you a couple of hours, then meet you outside. Look for a blue Pontiac without lights or police markings. My own car."

Grogan rose. "A lot of people say that marijuana is no more harmful than alcohol or tobacco. Do you believe that?"

"It might conceivably be true of the crude marijuana we get in this country," said Basil. "I doubt if it's true of the *ganja* and *charas* used in India. They are to pot what brandy is to beer."

"Didn't the strongest form, hashish, give us our word 'assassin'?"

"The words 'assassin' and 'hashish' both come from Hashishin, the name of Omar Khayyam's schoolmate who founded a secret society devoted to religious assassination, like Thuggee. Marco Polo assumed that the Assassins committed their crimes because they were under the influence of hashish. Actually they were spurred by religious fanaticism, and hashish was their reward. They didn't know Hashishin was feeding them a drug. They thought they were actually visiting Paradise. They thought Hashishin had solved the riddle of the universe and would tell them the secret when they reached the innermost circle of the society. The few who finally made it were bluntly informed: 'The only secret is that there is no secret.'"

"Didn't someone call marijuana 'The Pleasant Assassin'?"

"That was a botanist, Dr. Norman Taylor. *Cannabis sativa* has taken millions of poor Hindus through famines. Dr. Taylor said that to such it is a 'Pleasant Assassin' that kills only fear and grief. Don't ask me if he's right. I just don't know."

"Neither do I. But one thing I do know: as long as marijuana is illegal it brings young people into contact with the criminal world. The men who distribute to young, newly recruited pushers are professional criminals. They sell worse things than marijuana and they stop at nothing. That's what scares me."

The evening was too warm for an overcoat—it was the mild, moist evening of a New England May.

Basil walked through the archway under the State House, so like the archway under the Institute in Paris. It was like walking through an archway into the past. Gas still burned here in the street lamps. He had left tall buildings and asphalt sidewalks behind him. On Mount Vernon Street there were only low houses, with illuminated fanlights above Federal doorways, shining golden through the velvet dusk, and brick pavement that rose in little hillocks over the big roots of the Norwegian maples. As he walked, he crushed maple seeds underfoot.

He passed Louisburg Square, looking like an illustration for a Henry James novel. Wisteria blossoms poured down one housefront, scenting the tepid air with the very smell of spring itself. Cars along the curb, mostly small and foreign, were in jewel colors, polished as lovingly as old silver.

At the foot of the hill he came out on Charles Street opposite the old church that is still called the Meeting House. He could see both sides of the way curving toward Cambridge Street. There was no red neon sign announcing The Den of Iniquity.

Had they moved after Grogan's visit?

He walked on, scanning each housefront. He was halfway to Cambridge Street when he saw, on the other side of Charles, a single low-watt bulb shedding discreet light on a wooden sign. It was decorated with artfully amateurish letters that read: *The Poor Man's Paradise*.

So they hadn't moved. They had merely changed the name, making it less explicit, but still obvious enough to those in the know.

The Sky Flyer, The Giver of Delight, The Soother of Grief, The

Heavenly Guide, The Poor Man's Paradise . . . All these graceful phrases were used in India for what the Western mind called by such a short and unattractive word: pot.

There was a curtained shop window, as Grogan had said. Steps led down to a basement door, halfway below street level.

Basil opened the door.

It looked like the usual undergraduate hangout. Coffee and beer were the only drinks in view. Layers of blue and yellow smoke wavered across the room, but they smelled only of tobacco.

The plangent voice of a dulcimer rose and fell, weaving a little silver thread of sound under and over the level mutter of human voices. Some were dancing the still popular monosexual dances in which partners stand a foot or so apart. Most were sitting at tables.

No one looked at Basil. He felt like a ghost until he became aware of a pair of eyes staring at him from the shadows of an unlighted telephone booth, its door ajar.

To give himself countenance he started toward the bar, then came to an abrupt halt. A sudden draft parted the veils of smoke and he saw a face he knew well. Very well indeed.

Ivory-pale, delicate as a cameo, like her mother's face. Dark eyes, luminous in the shadow of fine densely black hair, also like her mother's. A sweet mouth.

Shock held him motionless.

"Why, Father, what are you doing here?"

She was sitting at a table with another girl.

"This is Anna Warsaw. She's in my dormitory."

Basil saw a head in shades of bronze and gold, light brown hair, hazel eyes, suntanned skin with a healthy glow under the tan.

"Do sit down, Dr. Willing," said Anna. "I suppose you're wondering how Gisela collected me and Tom after she left you."

"Tom?"

There were only the two girls at the table.

"Tom Piper. He's gone to get us coffee," said Gisela. "I ran into Tom and Anna on Beacon Street just after I left you. They were on their way to this new place, The Poor Man's Paradise, so I came along to see what it was like."

Anna was watching Basil's face. "This isn't New York, you know. Boston is just a village really—you're always running into people you know."

"Not just in Boston," said Basil. "When I lived in Italy I was told that 'Rome is just a village.'"

"You don't like this place," said Gisela.

"I've seen worse." Basil managed a smile.

"It's a do-your-own-thing place," she explained. "The management provides beer and coffee and a record player. People bring their own records, or guitars, or recite their own poetry, and some dance."

Basil looked toward the wriggling couples on the other side of the smoke veils. "What are they dancing?"

"Father, dances don't have names any more!"

"No names for the steps?"

"There aren't any steps." Her voice reproached him gently for such an archaic idea. "People just get up and make fools of themselves."

Basil's eyes were growing accustomed to the smoke and the dim light. All the boys and girls were in uniform. The new conformity. Pre-Raphaelite girls with long straight hair to their waists. Victorian boys with busy hair and sideburns or mustaches or beards. Boys in peasant smocks or antique military tunics. Girls in miniskirts or granny skirts. A costume ball without masks.

They didn't need masks. At that age their faces were masks, too bland and unformed to reveal either character or experience. The only clue to their thoughts lay in the pictures on the walls. Antiwar posters that owed something to Goya. Nightmarish fantasies that owed more to Hieronymus Bosch. Caricatures that would have amused Daumier. Nothing new under the sun.

At that thought some of the tension went out of Basil. How often he had said to his patients, "You must let your children go now. One of the hardest things a baby has to learn is to reverse the grasping reflex—to let go. It's hard for parents, too, but those who cannot let go are emotional misers, hoarders of love, who lose everything in the end."

Through the smoke haze a figure seemed to float toward them like some underwater thing drifting with the current. Orange hair stood out around its head in a great chrysanthemum. The young Paderewski before his hair went white. A sharp narrow face peered out of ambush like a small bird peering from a large untidy nest. He wore a tunic of goldprinted *sari* cloth in shocking pink and tight green slacks. The feet, like all feet that walk city streets in open sandals, were grimy.

"What took you so long?" asked Gisela.

"I stopped to telephone."

"And I bet you forgot the coffee!"

"Gosh, I did! I'll get it now."

"Oh, never mind. Sit down. Father, this is Tom Piper from Chicago. He's a prodigy. He entered Harvard at fifteen."

"And he's been there ever since," put in Anna. "Not a dropout. A dropin."

There were Pipers in Chicago who had given a Justice to the Supreme Court. Could this be one of that family?

"Hi!" The young man slid into a seat. Now that he was at the table, Basil could see a large button on his chest with a printed legend: *American Students For Mbongu!* Where was Mbongu?

Basil didn't want to reveal his ignorance by asking.

"You're Dr. Basil Willing, aren't you?" said Tom Piper. "I recognized you while I was in the telephone booth and you walked in. Your picture's on the jacket of your latest book. Must be interesting, being a forensic psychiatrist—at least, you make it sound interesting."

"You mean you're not sure whether I'm a competent psychiatrist or a persuasive writer?"

"Well, writing counts." The boy grinned. "Who would ever have heard of Freud if he hadn't been such a persuasive writer?"

"The sex helped," said Anna.

The crowd was thinning. Afterward Basil was never able to explain the impulse that made him count the number of people left in the room. Perhaps it had something to do with the layers of smoke that blurred their faces. Counting was a reaching out for definition.

"A bad omen. There are just thirteen people in this room now."

Gisela's eyes narrowed against the sting of smoke. "I see only twelve."

"Including me?"

"Including you. Anna, how many people do you see in this room?"

Anna glanced about her. "There are two by the bar. With the bartender that makes three. There are two dancing. There are three at a table. Total: eight. And we four make twelve."

"I must have miscounted," said Basil.

But he knew he hadn't and he was puzzled by the sudden disappearance of Number Thirteen. Where Basil sat he could keep

an eye on both outside doors and the two lavatory doors. No one had gone through any of those doors after his count. Was there a fifth door that he and Grogan had missed?

His glance came back to his own part of the room. The little puzzle solved itself as a light came on in the telephone booth nearby. Basil had forgotten the booth—had not seen it when it was dark. Someone must have just stepped inside and hesitated before closing the door that automatically switched on the light.

Now the light was bright inside, a hundred-watt bulb at least. Through the glass panel in the door he could see a boy dialing—the only boy in the room with hair cut short enough to show the shape of his head. Basil couldn't see his face, only his back and the dial of the telephone high on the wall.

The boy didn't look up the number or get it from Information. It was a number he obviously knew by heart. His fingers moved slowly and carefully as he dialed. Basil was close enough to catch the digits: 768-5829.

When the boy finished dialing he half turned, as if he were uncomfortable in the narrow booth. Now Basil could see his intent profile as he stood listening to whatever was coming through the receiver. After a few moments the boy replaced the telephone in its cradle without speaking and came out of the booth.

"Gisela! I didn't know you were here."

"Hello, Gene. This is Eugene Derry—my father, Dr. Willing. You know Anna and Tom, don't you? Do sit down a minute."

"Dr. Basil Willing? I thought I recognized you when I came in."

Basil studied the broad brow, the wide-spaced eyes, the straight nose. Comely, almost Grecian. He wore his hair at almost Byronic length, but he was clean-shaven. His open-necked white shirt suggested Rupert Brooke rather than the Beatles.

He grinned across the table at Tom. "Still working for Mbongu?"

"Damn right," said Tom.

"Where is Mbongu?" ventured Basil.

"Oh, Father, Mbongu isn't a place! It's a man—Ariosho Mbongu. He's in jail now, a political prisoner in Mandataland."

"Dare I ask where that is?"

"Before the war it was called East—"

"East Hell," interrupted Eugene. "At least, that's what G.I.'s called it during the war. It was an emerging nation even then."

Why can't they emerge and get it over with?"

"You'll have to make allowances for Gene," said Anna to Basil. "His full name is Eugene Debs Derry. When parents give you a name like that you just have to become reactionary."

Eugene smiled at Basil. "Not too reactionary to have enjoyed your books, Dr. Willing. I'm majoring in psychology."

"So am I," said Tom. "One of my professors is Jeremiah Pitcairn."

"The Pit Viper?" Eugene laughed.

"You study under him, too?" asked Basil.

"No, but I've read his books and I've met him. The old fraud!"

"We've all met him," said Anna. "He likes young people."

The innocence of that remark sent a chill down Basil's spine. He turned to Eugene. "Why do you call him a fraud?"

"He's all over you. He tries to make you think he likes you. But it's fake. You can tell after the first five minutes with him."

"Oh, come on!" Tom was impatient. "It's his ideas you don't like. You're living back in the thirties, Gene. The Pit Viper and his kind have gone way beyond you. They're living in the twenty-first century."

"The New Left, I suppose?"

"Hell, no! They're way beyond prescientific ideas like Left and Right. They're in computer country, man."

"Why is he called the Pit Viper?" inquired Basil.

Everybody smiled. It was Anna who answered. "Because he has a temper."

"I hate to break this up, but I really must be going," said Gisela. "Biology at nine A.M."

They all rose.

"I can give you a lift," Anna said to Gisela. "If I haven't been towed away. I'm parked right around the corner. Sorry I haven't room for you, Dr. Willing. It's a Fiat—only holds two."

"Thank you, but I'm living nearby," answered Basil. "Just a walk up the Hill. Good night, Tom. And Eugene."

"Good night, sir."

They left the two boys standing in the smoke haze. The Fiat was still there. Basil watched it drive off with the flat feeling that always comes to those who are left behind.

Slowly he walked back to Charles Street. Across the way from The Poor Man's Paradise a blue Pontiac, without lights, was parked at the curb. Basil stooped to look at the driver's face,

opened the door, and sat down beside Grogan.

"Any luck?" asked Grogan.

"Maybe. But it's just a hunch." Basil was looking at the dial of what seemed to be a telephone wired to the dashboard. "Is that a radio-telephone?"

"Yes. My own, not police. Want to call someone?"

"Not at the moment. Do you know anything about a political prisoner in Mandataland named Mbongu?"

"Another case of international injustice. Mbongu was jailed for demanding the sort of rights people take for granted in most Western countries."

"Does the telephone number 768-5829 mean anything to you? I saw someone dial that number."

"If he dialed the digit one first, it's an Essex number. If he didn't it's a Sussex number, closer to Boston so you don't have to dial one first. 768 is the office code for both Essex and Sussex. Both have the same area code as Boston, 617, so neither is a long distance call from here."

"I don't believe he dialed one first, but I'm not sure."

"Let's see what we can find out." Grogan picked up his radio-telephone and dialed. "Grogan speaking. Check the listing of this number, please, and call me back. 768-5829. Either Essex or Sussex, possibly both. . . Who are we waiting for? Doctor Pitcairn?"

"No, I doubt if he'll come here tonight. My daughter was in there with friends. I was addressed by name several times, just as you were. I would hazard a guess that Pitcairn has been warned. Again. Possibly by the same person who warned him last time, and who will now—I hope—lead us back to Pitcairn, and the evidence you need."

"Who is he? The one who phoned, I mean."

"It may be either of two young men. Tom Piper or Eugene Derry. They both knew who I was. Piper was in the telephone booth when I arrived and could have phoned then. Derry tried to telephone after I arrived and got no answer."

"He could be the Gene who telephoned last time and got no answer."

"Anna Warsaw was there again, too—the one who telephoned last time and did get an answer. She was sitting with my daughter when I walked in. She's driving my daughter back to college now."

"Could she have signaled to Piper when she saw you?"

"She didn't have to. He recognized me at once."

"I didn't think so many people there would know you by sight."

"Neither did I, but my picture was on the jacket of my most recent book. They all seem to have read it and they all seem to know Pitcairn. Tom Piper likes him. Eugene Derry doesn't."

"And you got some kind of hunch out of all this?"

"Yes—until I started talking to you. Now I'm beginning to wonder if—"

The radio-telephone buzzed.

"Grogan speaking... Thank you." He put down the receiver. "In Essex, 768-5829 is a private house, a new listing for somebody named B. G. Standish. In Sussex it's been the office phone number of a learned society for several years, the League of Spiritual Development. I suppose—"

Grogan's voice died as the door of The Poor Man's Paradise opened.

Three figures climbed up the steps to the street. There was a chorus of goodbyes and two figures turned toward the Common. The third crouched low to crawl into a low-slung Porsche at the curb.

"Can you follow him without his suspecting?"

"Probably not. Are you sure he's going to Pitcairn's?"

"Quite sure now."

"I know some short cuts he may not know and I can go faster than he can without being picked up for speeding. There are still some advantages in being a cop. We'll get to Pitcairn's house first and wait for him there....

Before long they were leaving Taunton and passing the sign that reads: *Cape Cod and the Islands*. Soon the ancient scent of the sea was salt in their nostrils, waking racial memories almost as old as life itself. They could not see the surf in the darkness, but they could hear its regular breathing.

A large white house stood alone on a spit of land half surrounded by the water of an inlet.

The only light was at a window on an upper floor.

Grogan parked his car in shadow under trees and switched off his lights.

He had hardly done so when a Porsche came around the corner on two wheels. Gravel spurted as it turned too sharply into the driveway.

The boy got out. He didn't knock or ring. He opened the front door without using a key and walked in as if he owned the place.

A French window to the right of the door lit up casting a patch of light on the grass outside.

Basil and Grogan walked across the turf without making a sound, skirting the patch of light from the French window. There were no curtains. They could look directly into the lighted room.

"Amateurs," whispered Basil. "Or they would have had curtains and drawn them."

The scene on the other side of the pane was as clear and bright and silent as something seen on color TV with the sound off.

It was a study, small, elegant, almost feminine. Paneling painted ice-green, molding picked out in silver, French furniture in natural fruitwood, an Aubusson faded to pastel tones on the parquet floor.

Behind the Louis XV writing table sat a bald man with a fringe of gingery hair and a fox face.

"Pitcairn?" whispered Basil.

"Yes."

He was unlocking a drawer in the table, his head bent over it. The boy stood by a fireplace of blond marble looking down at a cold grate filled with maidenhair fern.

Pitcairn took some cellophane packages out of the drawer and put them on the table.

Grogan caught his breath. "Decks. Heroin."

"The not-so-pleasant assassin," said Basil.

The window wasn't locked. Grogan pushed it open. It was the sound of its hinges that arrested the movement of Pitcairn's hand. He looked up—and faced ruin.

"Eugene, you fool!"

It was the cold rage of a viper striking.

"But no one followed me!" cried Eugene Derry.

"You gave the show away somehow or they wouldn't be here!"

"I didn't! I didn't, I tell you! Damn it, how could I?"

At police headquarters later, Grogan had some questions to ask Basil.

"I caught on to the League for Spiritual Development. Like 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds,' it's slang for LSD. But what put you on to Eugene Derry?"

"The number he dialed, 768-5829. I was hoping I had memorized

it correctly. I'd seen him dial it only once, and I hadn't had a chance to write it down. It's not easy to memorize telephone numbers that run to seven digits without letters, yet Derry had dialed it without first referring to a note or to the phone book. I was wondering how he had memorized it so easily when my glance fell on the dial of your radio-telephone. Then I knew.

"Letters that spell pronounceable words with some meaning are far easier to remember than a string of meaningless numbers. On the standard dial each number is associated with three letters. I asked myself: did any of the letters associated on the dial with 768-5829 spell out pronounceable words?

"They did. Derry didn't have to memorize a number to dial the League of Spiritual Development. All he had to do was to dial the letters that spell out the words POT-LUCY—words he could not forget if he were panicky or even stoned.

"The telephone company will give you any number you ask for providing it's not already in use, just as the Motor Vehicle people will give you a vanity number for the license plate on your car. Pitcairn was lucky. No one else in Sussex township already had POT-LUCY—that is, 768-5829."

"Wasn't that risky?"

"Not half as risky as letting Derry and other pushers carry around a written note of that telephone number. Who, watching another person dial, pays the slightest attention to the numbers being dialed or the letters associated with them on the dial?"

"There's a commercial firm in Boston that has the same notion. When you want to call them, you just dial the letters that spell the firm's name. Pitcairn may have got the idea from them."

"Why the League for Spiritual Development?"

"So no suspicious calls could ever be traced directly to Pitcairn's own number. Derry made an outgoing call that he knew would not be answered. He let the telephone ring an agreed number of times, then hung up. Whoever was on duty at the League of Spiritual Development would then call Pitcairn and relay the danger signal. So much safer than a conversation in code."

"I didn't suspect Anna Warsaw," said Grogan. "Not after you said you had let your own daughter drive off with her. But I did suspect the other boy. The one you said liked Pitcairn."

"How much more likely that Pitcairn's creature would pretend to hate him! And there's another psychological indication: I can't imagine a dope pusher working for a man like Mbongu."

Earl Derr Biggers

The Dollar Chasers

The series-detective "hat trick" is now a quintuple achievement: magazine appearance, book publication, motion picture, radio, and television. Earl Derr Biggers' Charlie Chan has performed the "hat trick" in grand style. That "patient, aphoristic-Chinese-Hawaiian-American" sleuth has been the protagonist of six excellent novels, all of which were serials in "The Saturday Evening Post"; and from these six stories, by the miracle of Hollywood, have come at least 40 full-length movies starring, among others, Warner Oland and Sidney Toler; in addition, from the same seemingly inexhaustible six novels, Charlie Chan became a weekly crimebuster on the air waves, and more recently, through the revival of the old movies, a TV favorite with devotees of the "Early Show," the "Great Show," the "Great Great Show," the "Late Show," the "Late Late Show," the "Million Dollar Movie" (no longer an impressive title in these inflationary days), "The Flick," and the "Best of Broadway." And, we are informed, there are new movies in the work, and Charlie Chan commercial tie-ups are being planned (pillows, posters—what, no chow mein or egg rolls?), and a TV "Special." TV commercials (for Volkswagen) have already appeared, and all six novels have been reissued in paperback. Thus, the name of Charlie Chan, long a "household word," is being perpetuated . . .

We wish we could bring you a Charlie Chan story, but alas there are only the six full-length novels, no more, no less. Mr. Biggers never wrote a Charlie Chan short story, novelet, or short novel. We remember corresponding with Mr. Biggers, back in the old "Mystery League" days, asking him—no, pleading with him—to write at least one Charlie Chan short story for posterity (and for anthology editors). But Mr. Biggers replied that if he could hit on a satisfactory plot idea for a Charlie Chan short, he would not squander it on 5000 or

even 10,000 words; he would expand the idea to a full-length novel. It was an argument we could not refute: like his beloved Confucius-oriented detective, Mr. Biggers was essentially a practical man . . .

But—

We can give you a Biggers surprise.

We have found a relatively "unknown" Biggers novel that has long been out of print, and it is a pleasure and privilege to rescue it from oblivion. *The Dollar Chasers* was first published in 1924; but, as you will discover, the passing of time—of two generations—has not added a single wrinkle or gray hair to the story. (How many so-called "serious" authors can make that statement about their early work?) This novel is almost as fresh a detective daisy today as it was 51 years ago!

True, there are small evidences of the termiting of time: reporters no longer work for fifty dollars a week; a large bundle of wash including shirts no longer can be laundered and ironed for one dollar; and most men no longer wear detachable collars. But these, you'll admit, are trivia: more important, multimillionaires and luck pieces are still with us, in fact and fiction; young girls are still attractive and romance still blooms, in fact and fiction; and even more important to our 'tec text, the baffling mystery has never grown old, and light-hearted detection, twistings of plot, unflagging action, and a humorous and genuinely charming style—none of these have aged; and these are the priceless ingredients of entertainment you now have in delightful prospect . . .

"Q"

It was a lovely, calm evening in San Francisco, and the sun was going down on Simon Porter's wrath. An old habit of the sun's—often it rose to find Simon in an equally turbulent mood; for twenty years of daily newspaper editing had jangled Simon's nerves and wrath sprang eternal in his human breast.

He crossed the city room in his quest of the youngest—and, as it happened, the ablest—of his reporters. The young man he sought was seated before one of the copy-desk telephones, gazing fondly into the transmitter and speaking honeyed words.

"Say, that's mighty kind of you, Sally . . . No, haven't heard about it yet, but I probably will . . . Tomorrow night at six. Pier 99. I'll be there. And I may add that in the interval, time will go by on lagging feet. No, I said lagging. It's poetry. See you tomorrow, Sally. Goodbye."

He turned to meet the chill eye of his managing editor.

"Ah," Simon Porter said, "so you call her Sally."

"Yes, sir," Bill Hammond answered respectfully. "It saves time."

"Does old Jim Batchelor know how you address his only child?"

"Probably not. He's a busy man."

"He'll be a lot busier when he hears about you. He'll have you boiled in oil. A newspaper reporter at fifty a week!"

"A mere pittance," Bill Hammond agreed.

"All you're worth," added the editor hastily. "I suppose the girl told you. I begin to see now. The whole idea came from her, didn't it?"

"She mentioned a delightful possibility," said the reporter. "However, I take my orders from you."

Simon Porter relapsed into wrath.

"Gives me about enough reporters to get out a good high school magazine," he cried. "And then sends one of them off on a picnic to please a girl!"

"Yes, sir," put in Bill Hammond brightly.

"I'm speaking of our respected owner. He's just called up—you're to go aboard Jim Batchelor's yacht for a week-end cruise to Monterey. Golf at Del Monte and Pebble Beach; and if there's anything else you want, ask for it. The launch will be at Pier 99 tomorrow evening at six. But you know all this."

"It sounds more authentic when you say it, sir."

"Bah! It's an assignment. I don't suppose she told you that."

"No, sir. She didn't mention sordid things."

"There's been an Englishman named Mikklesen afflicting this town for the past week. He's just back from ten years in the Orient and he isn't fond of the Chinese. Neither is Jim Batchelor. Neither is our beloved owner. You're to listen to Mikklesen talk and write up his opinions."

"Sounds easy," commented Bill Hammond.

"It's a cinch. Listening to Mikklesen talk is what those who hang round with him don't do nothing else but. All rot though. With real news breaking every minute—and me short of men!"

He started to move away.

"Er—I presume I don't come in tomorrow," suggested the reporter.

His chief glared at him. "Who says you don't? That line you got off about time going by on lagging feet—you spoke too soon. It won't lag. I'll attend to that—personally. You report tomorrow as usual."

"Yes, sir," answered Bill Hammond meekly. A hard man, he reflected.

"And listen to me." The managing editor retraced his steps. "About this Sally Batchelor—I suppose she's easy to look at?"

"No trouble at all."

"Well, you keep your mind on your work." His expression softened. "Not a chance in the world, my lad. Old Jim Batchelor couldn't see you with the telescope over at Lick Observatory. It's money, money, money with him."

"So I've heard."

"He's still got the first dollar he ever earned. He'll show it to you. Where is the first dollar you earned?"

"Somebody," said Bill Hammond, "got it away from me."

"Precisely. That's where you and old Jim are different. I'm telling you. I don't want to see a good reporter go wrong."

"A good reporter, sir?"

"That's what I said."

Bill Hammond smiled. It brightened the corner where he was.

"Tomorrow," he ventured, "is Friday—the day before the paycheck."

"I'll give you an order on the cashier," said Simon. He wrote on a slip of paper and handed it over.

"Twenty-five dollars!" Bill Hammond read. "And I was thinking of a yachting suit!"

Simon Porter smiled grimly. "You take your other shirt and go

aboard. Your role is not to dazzle. I've just got through telling you."

And he strode away to the cubbyhole where he did his editing. His departure left Bill Hammond alone in the city room, for this was an evening paper and the last edition was on the street. Jim Batchelor's prospective guest remained seated at the copy desk. He was, to judge from his expression, doing a bit of thinking. Some of his thoughts appeared to be pleasant ones, while others were not. The grave mingled with the gay, and this had been true of his reveries ever since that exciting day when he first met Sally Batchelor.

Sent by his paper to cover a charity fete for the benefit of some orphanage, he had caught his first glimpse of Sally's trim figure. Instantly something had happened to his heart. It had been, up to that moment, a heart that had lain singularly dormant in the presence of the opposite sex. But now it leaped up, threw off its lethargy, and prepared to go into action. It urged him to fight his way at once to this young woman's side.

Arrived in that pleasant neighborhood, he realized that his initial impression, startling and vivid as it had been, had not done the girl justice. She smiled upon him, and his heart seemed to say that this was the smile it had been waiting for. She was selling flowers, her prices were exorbitant; but the soft, lovely voice in which she named them made them sound absurdly reasonable. The somewhat unsteady Bill Hammond became her steady customer. Gladly he handed her all the money he had; and in other ways, too, it would have been evident to an onlooker that he was ready and willing to take her as his life's companion. If not, why not?

The answer was not slow in coming. Some busybody insisted on introducing them, and at the mention of her name Bill Hammond knew that this girl was, alas, not one of the orphans. True, she had at the moment only one parent—but what a parent! Jim Batchelor, president of the Batchelor Construction Company, was the sort of man who never let an obstacle stand in his way; but as an obstacle he himself had stood firmly in the way of a good many other people. And he would certainly make the stand of his life in the path of any practically penniless young man who had the audacity to court his daughter.

This bitter thought clouded the remaining moments Bill Hammond spent in the girl's company, and presently he left the char-

ity fete, resolved never to speak to her again. But as time went on it began to appear that the afternoon had been more eventful for him than for anyone else, the orphans included. He had fallen in love.

Love comes to many as a blessed annoyance, and so it came to Bill Hammond. Up to that moment he had been happy and care-free; which is to say, he had been young in San Francisco. Now he had a great deal on his mind. Should he give up all thought of the girl and go his way a broken man? Or should he get busy and acquire such wealth that his own paper would speak of the subsequent marriage as the union of two great fortunes? Generally, he favored the latter course, though the means to wealth did not appear to be at hand, as anyone who has worked on a newspaper will appreciate.

Meanwhile he was accepting dinner and dance invitations of the sort he had previously eluded. If his plan was to avoid Sally Batchelor, it did not work. She was frequently among those present, and, seemingly unaware of the vast difference in their stations, she continued to smile upon him. A sort of friendship—nothing more, of course—grew up between them. She accepted his escort occasionally, had tea with him at the St. Francis. And now she had arranged for him to go on this yachting trip and meet her famous father. He was to beard the mighty lion in his palatial floating den.

He was, there in the dusk of the city room, a bit appalled at the idea. Ridiculous, of course. Why should he fear Jim Batchelor? As far as family went, he had all the better of it. His ancestors had been professional men and scholars while Jim Batchelor's were neatly placing one brick in close juxtaposition to another. But money—ah, money. Those few bonds his father had left him, the paltry additional bunch that would be his when Aunt Ella died—chicken feed in the eyes of Batchelor, no doubt. In this cold world only cash counted.

Cynical thoughts, these; he put them aside. The spirit of adventure began to stir in his broad chest. Sally had been kind enough to arrange this party; she would find he was no quitter. He would go and meet this demon father face to face. He would discover what it was all about—the awe with which men spoke of the money king. Probably a human being, like anybody else. Yes, as Simon had suggested, he would take his other shirt.

Suddenly his thoughts took a new and more practical turn. He

pictured himself arrayed for dinner on the Bachelor yacht. In what? There was, he recalled, not a single clean dress shirt in his room, and his laundry would not be returned until Saturday. As for buying new linen the dent in that twenty-five dollars would be serious. What to do?

He pondered. Beyond, in the cubbyhole known—secretly—among the reporters as the kennel, he saw Simon Porter frowning savagely over a rival paper's last edition. Should he ask more money from Simon? The profile was not encouraging. Then into his mind flashed the picture of a Chinese laundry on Kearny Street he had passed many times. It was, according to the sign, the establishment of Honolulu Sam, and a crudely lettered placard in the window bore this promise:

LAUNDRY LEFT BEFORE 8:00 A.M.

BACK SAME DAY

What could be fairer than that? Honolulu Sam solved the problem.

Bill Hammond rose, called a good night to the man in the cubbyhole, and was on his way. It was his plan to go somewhere for a brief and lonely dinner, then hurry to his apartment, gather up his laundry, and place it in the hands of the speedy Honolulu Sam. Then he would return home and get a good night's sleep.

But such resolutions are rarely kept in San Francisco. Men hurry to their work in the morning, promising themselves that it will be early to bed that night for them. And then, late in the afternoon, the fog comes rolling in, and vim and vigor take the place of that cold-gray-dawn sensation. As a consequence, another pleasant evening is had by all.

Bill Hammond met some friends at dinner, and when he finally returned to his apartment it was too late to disturb the Chinese from Hawaii. He made a neat bundle of his proposed laundry, set his alarm clock for six, and turned in.

Get lots of sleep on the yacht, he promised himself.

At 7:30 the next morning, he stood at the counter of Honolulu Sam.

"Back five thirty this afternoon," Bill ordered loudly.

"Back same day. Maybe seven, maybe eight."

"Five thirty," repeated Bill Hammond firmly.

Sam stared at him with a glassy eye and slowly shook his head.

"Dollar extra for you if you do it," added Bill, and laid the currency on the counter.

Sam appropriated it. "Can do," he admitted.

"All right," said Bill. "I'll depend on you." He had meant the dollar only as an evidence of good faith, to be paid later. But no matter. A Chinese laundryman always kept his word.

He went out into what was practically the dawn, feeling confident of the future. With five clean shirts and other apparel in proportion, let them bring on their yacht. Easy, nonchalant, debonair, he would make himself the pride of the deep—and of Sally. Ah, Sally! At the corner of Post and Kearny the flower venders were setting out their wares. Bill took a deep breath. Life was a garden of blossoms.

When he reached the office, Simon Porter robbed the garden of its fragrance by sending him on a difficult assignment. All day he was kept hustling, with no time for lunch. It was exactly 5:30 when he grabbed his suitcase and set out for the bounding wave. Simon met him at the door and bowed low.

"Bon voyage, little brother of the rich," he said. "By the way, I've just heard you're to have a very distinguished fellow passenger."

"Of course. The Prince of Wales."

"Nobody so jolly—Henry T. Frost."

"What? Old Henry Frost?"

"Our beloved owner, our dear employer, the good master who has it in his power to sell us all down the river—and would do it without batting an eye. Here's your chance. Make the most of it, win his love and respect, and when I die of overwork, as I certainly shall inside a week, maybe he'll give you my job."

"I can't say I'm yearning to meet him," admitted Bill Hammond.

"You're talking sense. I've met him at least three hundred times, and I've always had cause to regret it. You know, something tells me you'd better stay home. You could develop whooping cough, and I could send one of the other boys."

"Nonsense!"

"Today is Friday."

"What of it?"

"Friday the thirteenth. Does that mean nothing to you?"

"Not a thing, sir. See you later."

"Well, fools rush in—" began Simon, but Bill Hammond had disappeared.

Young Mr. Hammond felt not at all foolish as he hurried down

Market Street, bound first for the establishment of Honolulu Sam, and later for Pier 99. The going was slow, for the street was crowded with commuters on their way to the ferries. This little cruise, he thought, might very well prove the turning point in his life. The next few days were as bright with glittering possibilities as a decked-out Christmas tree.

He turned down Kearny Street, that thoroughfare of adventures, and at Post an adventure befell him. The traffic was held up, and he was hurrying to cross in front of a very wealthy-looking automobile, when a familiar voice called, "Whoo-hoo Bill!"

He looked, and from the window of the car he beheld protruding the head of Sally Batchelor. It was a lovely sight, but one he would gladly have dispensed with at the moment. However, he had gazed straight into her bright eyes, and to pretend not to see her was now out of the question. He circled a plebeian taxi and reached her side. She was holding open the door of the car.

"This is luck," she cried gayly. "We're on our way to the pier. Jump in."

Jump in! Without his laundry! A cold shiver ran down his spine. Luck, she called this meeting, but he was not so sure. He noted that there were three other people in the car—an elderly woman and two men. One of the latter was undoubtedly Jim Batchelor, and—yes, the other was Henry Frost. Multimillions sitting there!

"I—I'm sorry," Bill stammered. "I've got a very important errand first. I'll see you later."

"What sort of errand?" inquired Sally.

"It's—it's just around the corner—"

"Get in. We'll take you there."

He shuddered at the thought of this fifteen-thousand-dollar car, with two Japanese servants in front, pulling up before the headquarters of Honolulu Sam, laundry left before 8:00 A.M., back same day.

"Oh, no, no, really—you go along, Sally. I'll follow in a taxi."

The traffic cop had signaled for an advance and a presumptuous flivver was honking indignantly just behind Jim Batchelor's magnificence.

"Go along, Sally," urged Bill Hammond nervously. A passing car flipped his coat tail.

"We'll draw up at the curb in the next block and wait for you," she answered, smiling sweetly. Obedience wasn't in her, evi-

dently. "Here, give me your suitcase. I'll keep it for you."

"Ah—er—no—no." He hugged it tight. "I'll keep it. I need it."

Another picture anguished him—the vision of himself rushing back to Jim Batchelor's presence with a large package all too obviously laundry. The clamor in the rear increased; the traffic cop was approaching.

"What's the idea here?" he wanted to know.

"Go along, Sally," Bill pleaded.

Now that he had the law on his side, she obeyed. Sinking back into the car, she closed the door in the policeman's face.

"Don't be long, will you?" she smiled.

The car began to move, and Bill dodged between it and the flivver, holding the precious suitcase close. Leaping for his life, he made the opposite curb, while angry chauffeurs inquired as to his sanity. He hurried on, groaning. Of all the inopportune meetings—

A bell clanged loudly behind him as he entered the steamy precincts of Honolulu Sam. He tossed a red check on the counter, and, plumping his suitcase down beside it, began to unfasten the clasps.

"Come on," he called. "A little speed here. Give me that wash."

The figure that emerged from the rear was not that of Honolulu Sam, but of a bent and aged Chinese wearing a pair of badly steamed spectacles. Sam, having business over on Grant Avenue, had left the place in charge of his uncle, down from Sacramento on a visit.

"Hurry, man, hurry!" cried Bill Hammond, waiting impatiently above his open suitcase.

But speed was not one of uncle's inborn traits. He deliberately wiped his spectacles on the tail of a handy shirt, took up the red check, and stood helplessly in front of the finished work.

"Please, please!" cried Bill. "It's done—I know it's done. I paid a dollar extra to make sure. Where's Sam? Say, listen, we're keeping all the money in San Francisco waiting. Let me help you—oh, I can't read that stuff. But please get a move on."

The old man made a gesture as of one requesting peace. He turned reproving spectacles on the customer. They were steaming up again. Once more he studied the rack, while Bill Hammond chattered wildly at his elbow. Finally the Chinese reached up and captured a fat package. Bill snatched it from him, tossed it into his suitcase, and began to close it. The Chinese was holding the

two pieces of the check close to his eyes.

"One dolla," he announced.

"And very cheap too," said Bill.

He paid with a five-dollar bill, receiving in change four of those heavy silver dollars still in circulation on the coast. As he dashed out the door the bell rang again like an alarm. The old Chinese was once more applying the tail of the shirt to his spectacles.

Making admirable speed, Bill Hammond returned to Post Street and located the splendid equipage that awaited him. One of the Japanese stood ready to take his bag and open the door. A bit breathless, he climbed in and established himself on one of the little collapsible chairs, the other of which was occupied by Sally. He sat sidewise and Sally sat sidewise, and the introductions began.

"Aunt Dora, this is Mr. Hammond." Bill bowed. The large commanding woman on the rear seat, who was mainly responsible for the congestion there, bowed also—sternly. "And do you know Mr. Frost?" Sally continued. "You ought to—you work for him."

Bill looked into the cold, fishy eyes of his employer. Henry Frost had the appearance of a deacon, though such was not by any means his reputation.

"How do you do, sir?" said Bill uncomfortably. "Mr. Frost can't possibly know all those who labor in his cause," he added.

"And Father. Father, this is Mr. Hammond."

Father held out a thin small hand. He was, indeed, a thin small man, quite unlike the accepted figure of the great financier. His face was ascetic, his eyes dreamy; there seemed, at first glance, nothing about his personality that would strike terror to an opponent. The aunt, towering like Mont Blanc at his side, was far more impressive.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Hammond," said the multimillionaire. "Sally has spoken of you."

"It's mighty kind of you, sir, to take me along like this—"

"An office assignment, I understand," put in Henry Frost in a high, unlovely voice.

"Oh, that's merely incidental," said Batchelor. "You'll find Mikklesen very interesting, Mr. Hammond. Ought to get a good story. But you're not to let work interfere with your outing; even if Henry—Mr. Frost—does happen to be with us." He smiled.

"I'll try not to, sir," Bill answered, smiling too. He felt much better. A human being, after all.

"I'm afraid my party's going to be mostly a stag affair," Jim Batchelor said, as the car swung into the broad expanse of Market Street.

"Well, we're used to that," said Sally. "Aren't we, Aunt Dora?"

"We ought to be by this time," sniffed that lady.

"There'll be Mrs. Keith, however," Batchelor went on.

"Mrs. Keith!" Henry Frost raised his bushy eyebrows.

"A very charming woman, Henry," said Jim Batchelor. "Lived in India a great deal, I believe. I want to have a talk with her about conditions over there. You see, this isn't only a pleasure cruise for me. There are two rather important questions I have to decide before I get back. There's that contract to build a bridge in India. I guess I mentioned it to you. I haven't made up my mind whether to make a bid for the job or not. Talking with Mrs. Keith and Mikklesen may decide me."

"I understand that Blake has already put in his figures," said Frost. "He'll probably underbid you."

"Very likely. But everybody knows Blake is a crook. I imagine I can get the contract away from him if I got after it. They tell me he's waiting anxiously to know what move I'll make. I'll spoil his game if I go in." Batchelor smiled, and it was no dreamer smiling then. "However, I've got several days. The bids don't close until next Thursday."

"And the other question, Jim?" asked Frost.

"Oh, the senatorship, I'm still thinking of entering the primaries."

"Nonsense!" growled his friend. "Why get mixed up in that sort of thing?"

"Just what I tell him," said Aunt Dora. "Still, Washington would be interesting."

"Well, I don't know," mused Batchelor. "Every man has ambitions that way, I guess. At any rate, I'm taking O'Meara, the lawyer, along on this cruise to talk over the situation. When it comes to politics he's one of the wisest."

"O'Meara!" Mr. Frost spoke sourly.

"It's a very mixed crowd, I'm sure," said Aunt Dora, and Bill Hammond felt that the glance she cast at him was a bit personal.

"A lot more interesting than a bunch of society folderols," Batchelor told her. "And when it comes to elegance, that end's taken care of, too. I've invited Julian Hill."

"Good news for Sally, I'm sure," remarked Aunt Dora, and

again the look she gave Bill Hammond had a meaning all its own.

Bill knew that they were speaking of the third vice-president of the Batchelor concern, a young man of good family and social position whose engagement to Sally Batchelor had more than once been rumored. He glanced at the girl, but she was staring straight ahead, and her charming profile told him nothing.

The car was gliding along the Embarcadero now, that romantic threshold to the Orient. Ships that were destined for far ports waited motionless but ready, and on the piers was abundant evidence of the great business done upon the waters. Suddenly Frost spoke.

"It's a wonder to me you could get anyone to go with you today," he said.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Batchelor.

"Friday the thirteenth," explained the newspaper owner.

"The thirteenth! Say, I didn't realize that!" Batchelor's tone was serious, and, glancing back, Bill Hammond was amazed at the gravity of his face.

"I didn't think you did," smiled Frost, "knowing your weakness as I do."

"What do you mean—weakness? I'm not superstitious." And Jim Batchelor smiled, as though he had just remembered something pleasant. "Besides, no bad luck can happen to us—not while I've got my luck piece in my pocket."

His luck piece? Bill Hammond looked at Sally.

"For goodness' sake," she laughed, "don't ask him to show it to you! That calamity will befall you soon enough, and at a time when I'm elsewhere, I trust."

The car came to a halt before Pier 99, the property of a steamship company in which Jim Batchelor was a heavy stockholder. At the end of the pier, close to where a smart launch was waiting, they found the remaining four guests who had been invited on Jim Batchelor's week-end cruise.

An oddly assorted quartet, Bill Hammond thought, as Sally hastily introduced him. Mike O'Meara he already knew, having more than once sought to pry an interview out of him. A huge, bluff, ruddy man, the lawyer was decidedly out of his element and seemed to know it, but he had a gift of gab to see him through. Julian Hill proved a suave, polished man in his thirties, garbed in just the right apparel; he had no interest whatever in meeting

Bill Hammond and didn't pretend any. Mrs. Keith was at that age where a woman knows that youth is going despite her gallant struggle. She had been, Bill sensed, a clinging vine in her day; but now she was a bit too plump and no doubt found the sturdy oaks elusive.

As for Mikklesen, he delighted the eye; he made the senses reel; he was magnificent. Tall, languid, with blue eyes and yellow hair, his slim figure clothed in tweeds, the Englishman added an artistic touch to any scene he chose to adorn: Save when he looked at Sally Batchelor, boredom afflicted him, and the indifference he showed in meeting Mr.—er—Hammond made the attitude of Julian Hill seem a bit too eager by comparison.

When the Japanese had got all the luggage aboard the launch, the guests followed. Bill Hammond had intended to sit beside Sally, but Mikklesen and Hill beat him to it, and he reflected that competition was going to be keen in the near future. He sank down beside Mrs. Keith. The launch sputtered and was on its way to where the seagoing yacht *Francesca* waited haughty and aloof, lording it over the more plebeian craft about her.

"Isn't this thrilling!" gushed Mrs. Keith. "You know, I haven't been on a yacht for ages."

"Same here," said Bill. "Grand to be rich, don't you think?"

"It must be," sighed the woman. "I never could manage it. You must tell me all about it."

"Me?" Bill Hammond laughed. "You've got the wrong number—excuse it, please. I happen to be one of the humble poor—only a newspaper reporter."

"Oh, indeed!" Her smile faded. "How exciting—a reporter! You have the most wonderful experiences of course. You must tell me all about it."

"Well," said Bill Hammond cautiously, "if I'm not too busy with my work I'll be delighted."

"Work—on the yacht?"

"I'm supposed to interview Mr. Mikklesen on conditions in the Orient."

She laughed. "Oh, really? Mr. Mikklesen is an old acquaintance of mine. I knew him in India. I'm sure he'll tell you the most interesting things—only you mustn't believe all you hear. He's a dear boy, but—imaginative. Oh, so very imaginative."

She glanced across to where Mikklesen was bending close to

Sally Batchelor. The look in her eyes was not friendly.

On the deck of the *Francesca* her captain waited to greet his owner. Japanese in white coats appeared to receive the baggage.

"Dinner's at seven thirty," Jim Batchelor announced. "After the boys have shown you to your quarters I suggest that you gentlemen join me in the smoking room."

"'Stag party' is right," smiled his daughter.

"Oh, well, the ladies too, of course," amended the owner of the *Francesca*. "I thought they'd be too busy—"

As a matter of fact, he had forgotten about the ladies. It was his habit; he was a man's man.

One of the Japanese, burdened with luggage, politely requested Bill Hammond to follow, and led the way to the deck below. Mikklesen also was in the procession, and Bill wondered if they were to share the stateroom. It was not a happy prospect, for he knew the Englishman would coolly take seven-eighths of any room assigned them. They entered a passageway off which the cabins opened, and at the third door the Japanese dropped Bill's modest suitcase and, staggering under the load of the Englishman's traps, led Mikklesen inside.

"This is your cabin," Bill heard him say.

Thank heaven, Bill thought. The Japanese emerged, took up the solitary bag, and led the way to the next door.

"So this is mine, eh?" Bill said. "Fine! Got it all to myself, I suppose."

"Yes-s," hissed the Japanese. "*Francesca* sleep fifteen guests."

"Good for the *Francesca*."

"Bath here," the servant said. He nodded toward an open door, beyond which gleamed spotless plumbing. Even as Bill looked, Mikklesen appeared in the doorway, gave him a haughty glare, then shut the door and locked it.

"Bath for two cabins," the Japanese said. "Yours, too." He seemed distressed.

"Well, you'd better explain that to him," suggested Bill. "Otherwise I'll never see the inside of that room again."

The servant disappeared. There was the sound of voices in the next cabin. Then the lock clicked in the bathroom door and the Japanese was again in Bill's room.

"All right now," he smiled.

"Maybe," said Bill. "What's your name?"

"Tatu."

"Well, Tatu—"

He handed him a five-dollar bill. The smile broadened.

"He leave door locked, you go through his room, unlock," said Tatu.

"You got his number, Tatu. Don't worry about me, I'll bathe all right."

The servant disappeared, and Bill stood for a moment staring through the porthole at San Francisco's interesting skyline. This was the life, he reflected, sailing gayly off into the unknown. His heart sank. Had he remembered to bring his shirt studs? Feverishly he opened his suitcase—thank heaven, there they were.

He went out in search of the smoking room. On the upper deck he encountered Jim Batchelor.

"Ah, my boy, come along," said the multimillionaire. "Maybe we can scare up a cocktail."

They found Henry Frost already in the smoking room.

"When do we get to Monterey?" he wanted to know.

"Early tomorrow," said Batchelor. "There'll be plenty of time for me to trim you a round of golf before lunch."

"You hate yourself, don't you?" answered Frost. "Ten dollars a hole is my answer to that."

"Piker!" chided Batchelor. "Play golf, Hammond?"

"In a fashion," Bill said. "Not so expensively as that, however."

"Oh, it wouldn't cost you anything to take him on," Batchelor replied. "He always pays. Henry's golf's a joke to everybody but Henry himself."

O'Meara came in. "Some boat you got here, Mr. Batchelor."

"Yes, it's quite a neat little craft."

"Little! It's the *Leviathan* of the west coast."

"Say, look here, O'Meara," Frost put in, "Jim here's got a crazy idea he's going to enter the senatorial primaries. Now you know the game—I'm relying on you to tell him he hasn't got a chance."

"I can't do that, and speak true," O'Meara replied. "He's got as good a chance as any of them. You put up your name, Mr. Batchelor," he added, "and leave the rest to us."

"Well, I haven't decided," Batchelor answered. "We'll talk it over later. Ah, Mr. Mikklesen, come in. Are you comfortably settled?"

"Oh, quite," said the Englishman. "It was most frightfully good of you to invite me."

"Well, my reasons weren't wholly unselfish," Batchelor admitted. "I've sort of lost track of things in India lately—thought you could set me straight."

"Any information I have, my dear sir, is yours. I believe you're thinking of that bridge contract."

"I am—seriously."

Mikklesen nodded. "Of course, it's a bit risky," he said. "The government isn't any too stable, to put it mildly. There are other difficulties—I'll speak of them later. Yes, decidedly risky."

"You bet it is," remarked Julian Hill, who had just come in.

"But I like risks," smiled Batchelor.

"I know, Governor; but this is the limit." Mr. Hill seemed very much in earnest. "I'm strongly opposed."

"You were opposed to that lighthouse job in South America, too," Batchelor reminded him.

"I happened to be wrong that time. But something tells me I'm not wrong now. Let's keep out. Don't you say so, Mr. Mikklesen?"

"I will say this"—the Englishman studied the end of his cigarette—"if you do go in, it will be a matter of what you call the breaks. They may be for you; they may be against you. You'll need all the luck in the world."

"Ah, luck," smiled Batchelor. "That's where the Batchelor Construction Company shines. For more than thirty-five years the breaks have been our way. And I've still got my luck piece." He took from his waistcoat a silver dollar.

Frost and Hill smiled at each other and turned away, but the other men regarded the coin with interest.

"Gentlemen," said Jim Batchelor softly, "there it is. The first dollar I ever earned. I was a kid of eleven at the time. My father was a mason and he was working on an apartment building they were putting up on Russian Hill. He heard they wanted a water boy and he got me the job. I had to fetch the water from a well that was a block away—a block down the hill. I carried an empty pail the easy route, but coming back it was filled, and I puffed and sweat and staggered up the grade. It was my first lesson in how hard money comes."

"On the first Saturday night I got my pay—this dollar—and I walked home with my father past shop windows that were one long temptation. 'What you going to spend it for, Jim?' my father asked. 'I'm not going to spend it,' I told him. 'I'm going to keep it—always.' And I have. For thirty-seven years it's been my luck

piece and it's made good on the job. I've felt it in my pocket at the big moments of my life, and it's given me confidence and courage. A little silver dollar coined in 1884."

He appeared to be holding it out to Mikklesen, and the Englishman reached out his hand to take it. But Jim Batchelor restored it to his pocket.

"And it's still working for me, gentlemen," he added.

"Poppycock," said Henry Frost.

"Maybe," smiled Batchelor. "But I hear there is a standing offer of one thousand dollars in the office of Blake and Company for that little luck piece. Poppycock, eh?"

"Oh, well, Blake knows what a fool you are," said Frost. "They realize the psychological effect on your mind if you lost that thing, so they're willing to pay for it."

"They'll never get the chance," answered Batchelor, and his eyes flashed. "I think I will go into that India thing. In fact, I know I will. Gentlemen, here are the cocktails."

They stood around a table, each with a glass in his hand. As Bill Hammond looked about him, he saw that the eyes of each man present were on the pocket that held the little silver dollar. Mikklesen lifted his glass.

"Here's to your good luck, sir," he said. "May it continue."

"Thank you," answered Jim Batchelor, and they drank.

At seven o'clock Bill Hammond set out for his stateroom to dress for dinner. At the top of the main companionway he met Sally—Sally in a breath-taking gown and looking her loveliest.

"Hurry up," she said. "I'm eager for someone to help me enjoy the sunset."

"Keep the place open," he begged. "I'm really the best man for the job. Sally, I know who it is I have to thank for this little outing. You're always doing something for the orphans, aren't you?"

"Were you glad to come?"

"Glad? What weak words you use!"

"I thought you would be. The yacht's a lot of fun really."

"It's not the yacht I'm thinking of. If you'd invited me out in a rowboat my joy would have been the same. You know—"

Henry Frost and Hill came up behind them.

"Dear me," said Sally, "what a long cocktail hour! I'm afraid Dad's been telling you the story of the dollar."

"He did mention it," said Hill.

"And I'm glad he did," Bill Hammond said. "It made him seem

mighty human to me. The picture of him struggling up Russian Hill with that water pail—”

“Dear Dad!” Sally smiled. “There is something rather appealing about the story. The first time you hear it, I mean. But when you’ve had it pop up constantly for twenty years, as I have, you’re bound to get a little fed up on it. I’ve been very wicked. There’ve been times when I wished to heaven he’d lose that dollar.”

“Here, too,” said Julian Hill. “Particularly when it leads Mr. Batchelor into some wild adventure like this India bridge contract.”

“Lose it!” cried Henry Frost. His little eyes glittered. “Why, it would ruin him!”

“Yes, I rather think it would,” said Hill; and it wasn’t so much what he said, Bill Hammond reflected as he hurried off to his cabin. It was the way he said it.

Mikklesen had left the smoking room sometime before, and as Bill Hammond passed the door of the Englishman’s cabin he was glad to hear a voice lifted in song inside. But when he reached his own room and tried to enter the bath, he found himself locked out. As he savagely rattled the knob he was happy to recall that George Washington won his war. Confound this Mikklesen—had he no consideration for anybody?

The answer was that he hadn’t; one look at him told that.

As Bill turned angrily back into his room, Tatu entered from the passageway.

“Very late, very busy,” said Tatu. “Now I lay you out.” And lifted a dinner coat from Bill’s suitcase.

“Never mind, I’ll attend to that,” Bill told him. “You go in and lay that Englishman out. Lay him out cold, and then unlock the bath for me.”

Tatu hastened away, and again there was the sound of voices in the next cabin. The lock in the door leading to the bath clicked and Tatu emerged. Bill dashed by him and turned the key in Mikklesen’s door.

“You run along, Tatu,” he said. “I’m in too much of a hurry to learn how to be valeted tonight. Sometime when we’re both free you can give me a lesson.”

“You want me, ring bell,” suggested Tatu, going.

Bill was hastily peeling off his clothes. If he was to have a few moments alone with Sally and the sunset, speed was the watchword. But he had been known to rise in the morning, bathe,

shave, dress, and reach the office in less than twenty minutes, and he was out now to smash the record.

As he was putting the finishing touches on an elaborate shave, Mikklesen began to rattle the door knob. He rattled long and earnestly, and it was music to the reporter's ears.

"Oh, I say, old chap, you're not annoyed, are you?" Bill murmured. "Not really? How beastly!"

"Damn!" said a voice, and the clatter ceased.

Bill hurried from the bathroom, leaving the lock *in statu quo*. By way of preparation he laid out his diamond shirt studs—rich-looking, if old-fashioned—the property of poor Uncle George, handed to Bill by Aunt Ella the day after the funeral.

Humming happily to himself, he lifted the fat package of laundry into the open. Good Honolulu Sam, he had certainly come across as promised. That back-same-day promise was on the level. Must have hurried some. Great people, the Chinese; you could bank on them. If they said they'd do a thing, they did it. He snapped the string with his fingers and gently laid back the wrapping paper. A bright pink shirt stared up at him.

It is astonishing sometimes, in the crises of our lives, how slow we can be in comprehending. Bill's first reaction was to wonder how this sartorial atrocity had got in with his things. He tossed it aside and was confronted by the purplest shirt he had ever met. Next in line of march came a green shirt that would have made excellent adornment on St. Patrick's Day. Then some rather shabby underwear and eloquent socks. A few collars. But no more shirts!

Bill Hammond sat down weakly.

"Good lord," he cried. "It's not my laundry!"

And if comprehension had been slow in coming, it came now with a rush. Alone, all alone on a restless ocean, and without a dress shirt to his name. Dinner in fifteen minutes. At least two rivals for Sally's favor present, and each an elegant dresser.

And this was the cruise on which he had hoped to make a dashing impression, to win Sally's family, to say nothing of the girl herself, by his charm. How did one do that without a dress shirt?

Anger overcame him. Nor did he have any trouble locating the object of his wrath. That half blind old Chinese with the steaming spectacles—there was the guilty party.

The old idiot! In one careless moment he had destroyed the priceless reputation of his race—for accuracy, built up laboriously

through many years of giving back the right shirt to the right customer—destroyed it utterly, doomed his race to extinction. For Bill Hammond would attend to that personally, and he would begin in the establishment of Honolulu Sam.

But time was passing; he mustn't waste any more of it planning the massacre of an aged Chinese. The problem was here and now. What to do? The weather was calm enough, but the *Francesca* was tossing about a bit. He might retire to his berth and plead sickness. And leave Sally to the company of Mikklesen and Julian Hill? Not likely! No, he must have a shirt—robbery—a killing or two, maybe—but he must have a shirt.

Was there anyone aboard who would help him? O'Meara, perhaps; but no, O'Meara's shirt would go round him at least twice. As for the other men, there was not one to whom he would consider revealing his plight. Sally—if he could bring himself to tell her—would be sympathetic, but Sally had no dress shirts to distribute. That left—hold on—that left Tatu. Thank heavens he had given Tatu five dollars.

He rang the bell and almost immediately Tatu appeared. Frankness, it seemed to Bill, was the only course.

"Terrible thing's happened, Tatu," he said. "See"—he indicated the frightful pink shirt—"Chinese laundry returned the wrong wash—I haven't any dress shirt."

"Chinese not reliable people," commented Tatu.

"You said it. Sometime you and I'll have a long talk about that. But now, Tatu, now—dinner coming on. What to do?" An idea flashed into his mind. "You haven't an extra shirt, have you?" he inquired hopefully.

Tatu opened his coat and revealed a fine white bosom—but no shirt went with it.

"Have extra bosom," he said. "Maybe you like—"

"No, no, I couldn't take a chance. Must have an entire shirt. There's five more dollars waiting for you if you can dig one up."

Tatu considered. "Maybe," he said. "I find out."

He went on his momentous errand. Bill, left alone, put on his shoes. Slowly but surely the structure was approaching completion. But the shirt! Would that necessary, that vital bit of facade come to hand? Or must he sit shirtless in his cabin while the gay diners made merry round the festive board?

Something in Tatu's eye made Bill feel that this was a moment for caution. He turned off his light and opened the door leading

into the dim passageway. No one in sight. Where was Tatu anyhow? The door of the cabin at the end of the corridor began to open slowly, and a man emerged. He looked warily about him, and then, walking on tiptoe, started down the passageway. Tatu? No, it wasn't Tatu. Bill Hammond, peering from the darkness as the man passed his stateroom, saw clearly who it was. He watched him open the door of a stateroom farther down and disappear.

Nervously Bill sat down on his berth. Would Tatu never come? Why, he'd had time enough to scare up a whole outfit—then Tatu appeared in the doorway. Bill leaped up, closed the door behind him, and snapped on the light.

Rapture! There was a gleaming dress shirt in Tatu's hand. Like a drowning man going after the well-known straw, Bill pounced on it.

Tatu hung onto it. "Maybe too big," he said. "I put in studs."

He took up one of Uncle George's diamonds and began to struggle with the shirt. "Very stiff bosom," he announced. "Oh, very stiff."

"What size is it?" demanded Bill, feverishly investigating the collars bequeathed him by the owner of the pink shirt. He had a vision of sending out again for a collar.

"Doesn't tell size," whispered Tatu. "No name of maker also. That very good."

Bill experienced a momentary qualm.

"Where'd you get this shirt, Tatu?" he demanded sternly.

"I get him," replied Tatu. "Here, try on."

"A little large," said Bill. "But it's a shirt. And say, look—this collar fits. Luck, Tatu, luck. Wow, the bosom is stiff! Got to be proud and unbending tonight." He was silent, working on his tie.

"Everything fine," Tatu hinted.

"Oh, yes, the five dollars. Here you are. Say, listen, Tatu, I'm not sure that we ought to have—er—borrowed this. We'll have to return it."

"I return it," Tatu agreed.

"That's right; of course we'll give it back; along with a dollar to cover depreciation and washing. Honesty, Tatu—the best policy."

"Yes-s, thank you."

"Always be honest and you'll fear no man." The Japanese was at the door. "Say, Tatu, I really ought to know where you got it."

"I got him," smiled Tatu, and went out.

Well, a desperate situation required a desperate remedy. Bill got into his trousers and was slipping on his coat when the first notes of *The Roast Beef of Old England*, played falteringly on a bugle by a pantry boy with ambitions, floated down to him. Mikklesen was once more rattling at the bathroom door, and after extinguishing all the lights, Bill noiselessly unlocked it, then hurried upstairs to find Sally. Her eyes reproached him.

"The sun went down," she said, "and you never came up."

"I know," he answered; "forgive me." He straightened his collar nervously. "I was detained."

"That's not much of an explanation," she told him.

"Thank you," he said absently. He was thinking that the owner of the pink shirt certainly needed some new collars. This one had a razor edge and seemed to have been recently honed.

"You're perfectly welcome," smiled Sally, "whatever it is you're thanking me for. Pardon me for mentioning it, but are you in your right mind?"

"Of course not," he said. "I knew you were lovely, but somehow tonight—well, as the fellow said, my senses reel."

Sally rose. "We'd better have the next reel in the dining room," she suggested. "Dad hates people to be late."

Bill found he was to sit on Sally's right, and the discovery cheered him, particularly as Henry Frost was on the other side of her—an arrangement that couldn't be improved upon. His spirits rose rapidly. Minutes before, plunged in despair, he had emerged triumphant and all was right with the world. What a lot of difference somebody else's shirt could make!

During the first course Jim Batchelor suggested that Mikklesen tell something of his experiences in the Orient, and from that point the dinner was a monologue. But like most Englishmen of his class, Mikklesen was a charming talker and well worth listening to. He spoke of his adventures as subeditor of an English newspaper in Shanghai, of the time he had typhoid in the General Hospital in Yokohama, of the fight he got into one gory night at the old Danish hotel where the beachcombers hold forth in that lovely port. He took his hearers into the interior of China on a scientific expedition, thrilled them with a holdup by bandits, and brought them back in time for an audience with an ambassador in Peking. Life as he had known it had been glamorous.

It was not until the coffee that he appeared to run down and the conversation became general. Suddenly there was one of those

inexplicable lulls in the gentle buzz of talk, and the voice of Jim Batchelor rang out in conversation with Mrs. Keith at his right.

"And I have kept it—all these years. In the big moments of my life I've felt it in my pocket and it has given me courage to go on. A little silver dollar coined in the year—"

"Oh, dear," Sally laughed, "he's telling her about his luck piece."

"Thrilling!" Mrs. Keith said. She smiled encouragingly on the multimillionaire. "You've got it with you still?"

"I certainly have." He removed something from his pocket. "My luck piece." He stared at it, his face paled slightly. "This—is not—my dollar," he said slowly.

A tense silence fell.

Sally finally spoke: "Not your dollar, Dad? What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. This is a dollar coined in 1903." He threw it down on the table and began to search his pockets. Again the silence. His search was evidently fruitless. "I—I'm very sorry this has happened," said Batchelor. "It may seem rather trivial to you, but to me it's almighty important. If—if it's a joke of some sort, I—I don't appreciate it. However, I'll overlook it if the joker will own up at once. In heaven's name"—his voice trembled—"is it a joke?"

He looked eagerly into each face around the table. No one spoke. Batchelor's eyes hardened.

"Then there's some more sinister motive back of it," he said.

"Nonsense, Jim!" said Aunt Dora. "You're making a mountain out of nothing."

"I'm the judge of that," Batchelor said, and his voice was like chilled steel. "However"—with an effort he managed to smile—"you're right, in a way. I mustn't spoil the party."

The tension lessened, and Mrs. Keith took that moment to show sympathy.

"What a pity!" she said. "Perhaps one of your crew—"

"No, Mrs. Keith," Jim Batchelor said; "my crew has been with me for years. The servants—I'm not so sure. They will all be examined before leaving the yacht. And before we drop the subject, has anyone else missed anything?"

Bill Hammond's heart stood still. The shirt! Somebody would speak up regarding the mysterious disappearance of a shirt, and where would that lead? Little beads of perspiration stood on his forehead. But no one said anything. Evidently the owner of the

shirt was still ignorant of his loss. Bill breathed again.

"Well, that's that," said Batchelor. "We'll let the matter drop."

"One minute!" O'Meara was on his feet. "Before we do that I've got a suggestion to make. Mr. Batchelor here has lost something of value, and until it's found we're all under a cloud. I for one want to be searched, and I guess every honest man here feels the same way."

"Nonsense!" Batchelor cried. "I won't hear of it!"

"But Mr. O'Meara is right," said Mikklesen. "I recall a dinner at the British Embassy in Delhi two years ago, when the hostess lost a diamond necklace. It was a most distinguished party, but we were taken one by one into an anteroom and gone over with amazing thoroughness." He, too, stood up. "I also insist," he said.

"Rot! I wouldn't insult my guests," Batchelor was still protesting.

"You'll have nothing to do with it, Governor," Julian Hill told him. "We're going through with this for our own satisfaction. If the ladies will wait in the lounge—"

Reluctantly Aunt Dora, Mrs. Keith, and Sally left. O'Meara promptly removed his coat.

"Now one of you go over me," he said, "and I'll do the job for the rest of you."

Julian Hill stepped forward to oblige. With a none too easy conscience Bill Hammond also removed his coat. That shirt was not a successful fit—suppose someone recognized it. O'Meara, having been pronounced innocent, went at his work with enthusiasm. But the search had no results. Through it Jim Batchelor sat staring at the table as though the matter held no interest for him. O'Meara finished emptyhanded.

"Well, if you boys have had done with your nonsense," remarked Batchelor, "we'll join the ladies. And as a favor to me we won't speak of this again—tonight."

Aunt Dora was superintending the placing of two tables for bridge in the main lounge. It appeared there were just the right number—with one left over. After she had disposed of the usual impassioned pleas from those desiring to be the one left out, Julian Hill was elected to that position, and shortly disappeared from the room. They cut for partners, and to his horror Bill found himself seated opposite Aunt Dora. She had the air of being the person who had invented bridge, and so she had, practically.

Bill dealt. Majestically, Aunt Dora took up her hand.

"Count your cards," she ordered. "That's the first rule. What rules do you play, Mr. Hammond?"

"Rules?" repeated Bill wanly. "I don't know. I just play."

"We'll pivot," said Aunt Dora promptly.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," said Bill meekly.

"I mean to say, we'll change partners frequently."

"Oh," said Bill heartily, "I'm for it."

The glare she turned on him moved him to look the other way, and his eyes met those of the man he had seen creeping along the corridor just before dinner. He became suddenly thoughtful, so that Aunt Dora's voice suggesting that he bid seemed miles away. However, it came rapidly nearer.

As the play progressed, Aunt Dora found that she alone seemed to be giving the matter her best thought. She was a woman of superb endurance, but after a distressing rubber with O'Meara as partner, she called it an evening and rang the gong. The ship's clock had recently struck six bells, and after a careful calculation and a look at his watch, Bill Hammond knew that it was now just after eleven.

Mikklesen and Julian Hill both seemed determined on a bed-time chat with Sally, but after a meaningful look at Bill Hammond the girl dissuaded them.

"Wait till I get a wrap," she whispered to Bill. "I want to tell you about that sunset."

When she returned she led the way to a couple of chairs that stood close together in a secluded spot on the afterdeck.

"Wonderful night," Bill murmured. The Pacific was calm, the water was liquid silver in the moonlight, the breeze was not too chill. A great night to be young, and they both were.

"Glad you like it," said Sally. "It's just what I ordered."

They sat silent for a moment.

"How was the sunset anyhow?" Bill inquired.

"Not bad at all," said Sally, "for the sun. I think I prefer the moon myself." A long, long silence. "Bill, say something," the girl protested at length. "What are you thinking?"

"I'm just wishing. I'm wishing your name was Sally Jones and your father was principal of a high school—and paid accordingly. It's what I've been wishing every since that day at the charity bazaar."

She laughed. "Dad never wasted any time on high schools," she said. "Still, it does no harm to wish."

A cooler breeze arrived from the Pacific. Bill rose, took up a rug from a nearby chair, and tucked it about her. His hand touched hers, and contrary to his intention he seized and held it.

"Sally!" he said ecstatically.

"Bill!" she answered.

He gave up the idea and sat down. Another silence.

"How—how do you like my father?" she asked presently.

"Oh, he's all right. But it doesn't matter what I think of him. He'd be just as interested to get the opinion of one of those goldfish in the lounge."

"Well, I don't know," said Sally. "Dad's pretty human. You must remember, he hasn't always traveled on yachts. At one time he was a stonemason, earning a hundred a month."

"How long ago was that?"

"About the time he was—married."

The way she said it, somehow; the night, the moon, the bracing effect of ocean air—whatever the cause—

"Sally," Bill heard himself saying. "I'm in love. With you, I mean. But I guess that isn't news, is it?"

"Not precisely," she answered slowly. "However, I'm glad you said it. We couldn't have got anywhere if you hadn't."

"Sally!" The moon was under a cloud. It was just as well.

"It's no use, Sally," said Bill, coming to. "Your father would never hear of it."

"He'd be bound to."

"You know what I mean. He'd have me—boiled in oil."

"He'd have to boil me, too."

"Sally, you're wonderful! Will you—will you take a chance with me?"

"I don't like the way you put it. I'll marry you, if that's what you mean."

"On our own—that's what I'm getting at. I've seen so many men marry rich girls and become lap dogs. I wouldn't take a cent from your father—nor a job either."

"Don't worry, you wouldn't get either."

"Sally, I never intended to tell you this. I was just going to eat my heart out in silence, like the strong, silent man that I am."

"Well, that would have been romantic. But I think I like it better this way. My role is a bit more active."

"Darling! What do you think I'd better do? Should I speak to your father the next time I see him?"

"Of course. Say good night or good morning, as the case may be, and that's all."

"Well, I suppose he would hit the ceiling."

"He wouldn't stamp round and forbid it, if that's what you think. It's not his way—he's too subtle. He'd just quietly queer it; nobody would ever be sure how it was done either. He's fathom's down, Dad is."

"Certainly sounds too deep for a frank, wholesome lad like me."

"I think we'd better—just drift along," Sally said. "Give him a chance to take a liking to you."

"You believe in long engagements, then?"

"Nonsense! I'm fond of you. And Father and I are much alike." She pondered. "If you could only make a hit with him somehow. I'd never be quite happy about marrying anybody—not even you—if he was opposed. He's really wild about me."

"Naturally."

"Poor Dad. He's broken-hearted. That silly little dollar meant so much to him."

It was Bill's turn to ponder.

"You know, Sally," he said, "I've done considerable police reporting, and on more than one occasion a hard-boiled detective has complimented me. I've dug up some rather important evidence."

"Oh, Bill, that's an idea!"

"If I found that dollar for him, do you think he'd give me you as a reward?"

"He wouldn't stop there. He'd throw in Aunt Dora and the yacht."

"You give me pause. I mean—I couldn't afford the yacht."

"Bill!" Her eyes were shining. "Let's work on the case together. What's the first move? We talk over the suspects, don't we?"

"That might be a good idea. We'll start with you. You said yourself there were times when you hoped he'd lose it."

"Yes, I know. I'm sorry I said it now. Do be serious, Bill. Aunt Dora—she wouldn't take it."

"But you can't eliminate anybody that way."

"Yes, you can. A woman's intuition. Mr. Mikklesen—no motive. Mr. O'Meara?"

"He's a politician. Their ways are deep and dark."

"I feel that; and he was so insistent on being searched. That's always suspicious."

"I thought it was rather fine of your father—his courtesy to his guests. He was against the search."

Sally laughed. "Don't be fooled by Dad's courtesy," she warned. "He knew darn well nobody would be fool enough to steal his dollar and then walk in to dinner with the thing in his pocket. Dad's the soul of hospitality and all that, but he wants that dollar back, and before he gives up he'll put all his guests through the third degree, if necessary. Let's see, there's Julian Hill. He seems awfully keen to keep Dad out of that Indian job."

"Yes, Hill's a possibility. And how about Mrs. Keith? Know anything about her?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, she's poor," said Bill. "She told me so. But then, so am I. By the way, don't let's overlook me."

"Nonsense! You wouldn't take anything that didn't belong to you."

"You think not?" Certainly a stiff bosom on that shirt.

"Oh, Bill, it's all so hopeless," she sighed. "If we only had a shred of evidence to go on!"

"Maybe we have."

"Bill—not really?"

"You've forgotten one guest. What motive would Henry Frost have in stealing that dollar?"

"None whatever, so far as I know."

"That's the way I feel," Bill went on. "Yet as I understand it, your father's cabin is the one at the end of the corridor off which our rooms open." She nodded. "And just before dinner I certainly saw Henry Frost come out of that room, acting very strangely. He tiptoed along the corridor and slipped into his own room."

"Bill! It seems ridiculous!"

"I know it does. My saintly employer! He'll be awfully pleased with me if I can fasten this thing on him."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know. It's a delicate situation. If I go to your father with my story, Frost will probably have some simple explanation that will make me look like a fool. It seems to me it wouldn't be a bad scheme if I put the matter up to Frost and let him explain to me—if he can."

"Goodbye, job."

"Probably; but in the interests of justice—and there are other newspapers."

"Well, if you really think it's the best plan—"

"Maybe not, but I'm going to try it. I can't treat old Frost as a criminal, and shadow him: I don't really think he took the dollar anyhow. But I should like to know what he was doing in your father's room. I'd better see if I can find him."

"How thrilling!" Sally said. "We're in this together, remember. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Do you think I'll do for Watson?"

"No, you're altogether too intelligent," Bill told her.

"Oh, Bill, do you think I've got brains? I love brains."

"And I love you. You—you really meant all that—about marrying me? It doesn't seem possible."

"It's more than that; it's probable. Good night—and good luck."

"This is my lucky night," he told her. And it was, for she was in his arms.

His luck held even after he left her, for he found Henry Frost sitting alone over a highball in the smoking room. His employer evinced no joy at seeing him, but Bill casually lighted a cigar and seated himself.

"Unusually smooth passage," he remarked.

"Smooth enough," said Mr. Frost.

"Awfully jolly cruise, it seems to me. Nothing to mar it—except, of course, the disappearance of that dollar. Too bad about that."

"A great pity."

The old man drained his glass and seemed about to rise.

"Just a moment, Mr. Frost," Bill said. "You're an older man than I am, and I'd like to ask your advice."

"Yes?"

"If any one of us has any evidence that might prove useful in tracing the—er—theft, it should be passed on to our host. Don't you agree?"

"No question about it."

"I'm in a rather difficult position, sir. I happened to be standing at my door just before dinner—the light was off at my back—and I saw a man come out of Mr. Batchelor's cabin and go down the corridor to his own. His actions were rather peculiar."

"Really?"

"Now what would you do in my position, sir?"

"I'd certainly tell Jim Batchelor all about it."

"But, Mr. Frost—you were the man."

Business rivals sometimes referred to Mr. Frost's countenance

as the great stone face. Not without reason, thought Bill as his employer sat grimly regarding him.

"How much," said Frost, "do they pay you at the office?"

"This is not a case of blackmail, sir," he said.

The old man's eyes flashed dangerously.

"Who said anything about blackmail? I was just going to add that whatever you get you're overpaid, for you're the stupidest whippersnapper I've ever met. Why should I take Jim Batchelor's dollar?"

"I don't know, sir."

"No, nor does anybody else. I did go to his room, and I did filch something from him; but it was nothing of importance. I'll explain it to you, though I don't know that I'm under any necessity to do so. For years Jim and I have had an argument about valets. He claims I need one, and I claim I'm still competent to dress myself. When I opened my bag tonight I discovered that I had foolishly come aboard without any collars."

"No collars?" repeated Bill. Then multimillionaires had their troubles too.

"Precisely. I wasn't going to tell him—I never would have heard the last of it. I knew we wore the same size, so when he was in his bath I slipped in and took one of his collars. That explains what you saw, and you're at liberty to go to him with your story any time you like."

You sound fishy, old boy, Bill thought. But then, so would his tale about the shirt. "I'm not going to say anything to Mr. Batchelor," he announced. "Not for the present, at least."

"Just as you please." Frost stood up. "I'll bid you good night."

"One moment, sir. Should I go on with that interview with Mikklesen? I mean—am I still working for you?"

For a long moment they stared into each other's eyes. It was the employer who first looked away.

"Ah, yes, the Mikklesen story. Go on with it by all means."

Bill smiled knowingly as he watched Henry Frost leave the room.

"Who said anything about blackmail?" he murmured.

The decks of the *Francesca* were deserted as Bill hurried to his stateroom. The berth looked good. Hastily he removed his coat, his collar, and then the ill-fitting shirt. Glad to get that off. Still, it had been better than none. He laid it down on the narrow settee and Uncle George's studs seemed to flash up at him reprov-

ingly. A Hammond in a borrowed shirt!

Get *Tatu* to return it in the morning, he thought. I can buy another in Monterey.

Once in the berth he lay for a time reflecting on the great event of the evening. Sally loved him. It had seemed a dream too remote to consider, yet here it was, coming true. Life was certainly kind to him—all this happiness—obstacles in the way, of course—

Ho-hum. Must find that dollar. Who had it? Funny about old Frost. Explanation didn't sound right somehow. Yet it might be true. How about the others—Hill, O'Meara, Mrs. Keith? So many possibilities. Confusing—sure was confusing—possibilities—He slept.

He awoke with a start. It was still dark; he could see nothing; but he knew instinctively there was someone in the room.

"Whoosh there?" he muttered, still half asleep.

A noise—the opening of a door. Bill leaped from the berth, snapped on the light, and looked out into the corridor. At the far end of that dim passage he saw a dark figure mounting, two at a time, the stairs to the upper deck. He grabbed his dressing gown, shuffled into his slippers, and followed.

His pause to get into slippers was fatal to the pursuit, for when he reached the deck he appeared to be alone in the world. He was fully awake now, but completely at a loss as to his course. He walked along the rail, uncertainly, toward the stern of the boat. Suddenly he stopped.

The sight that arrested him was not on the yacht, but on the calm surface of the moonlit waters. There, floating rapidly away from the *Francesca* on the wet Pacific, was a white shirt—a dress shirt. The thing was unbelievable, yet there it was; and—did he imagine it?—were not those Uncle George's precious diamond studs sparkling in the bosom that lay on the broader bosom of a very large ocean?

Farther and farther away drifted the shirt with Uncle George's legacy aboard, and, fascinated, Bill moved along the rail, his eyes glued on it in fond farewell. A voice spoke suddenly and his heart stood still.

"Hello! Out for a stroll?"

He turned. A dark figure was sitting in the lee of the dining room, and the red light of a cigar burned steadily.

"That you, O'Meara?" Bill asked.

"Sure is. Lovely night, ain't it?"

"Have you been here long?"

"About an hour and a half. Seemed a pity to turn in on a night like—"

"Never mind the night. Who was it ran up here just before I did?"

"Who was what?"

"Somebody was in my cabin—I followed him up here."

"Say, kid, you'd better take something for your nerves. You're the first human being I've seen for an hour and a half."

"Been here all that time, eh?" said Bill. "Yet that cigar's just been lighted."

"It happens to be my third," said O'Meara. "And if I was you, I wouldn't try the detective business. It ain't for kids. There's something doing on this boat—we all know that. But I'm not in on it. I'm just on a little cruise for my health—see? Just out to get a little peace and quiet after a busy week in the city. And that's what I was gettin' until you dashed up like a wild man and made a nasty crack about my cigar."

"Oh, no offense," said Bill. "Only—"

"Only what?"

"I suppose you were so taken with the peace and quiet you missed that other fellow completely."

"You go back to bed and rest them nerves."

"That's what I'm going to do," Bill answered, and left hastily.

He was, indeed, in a great hurry to return. He dashed into his stateroom and looked anxiously about. It was as he feared—the shirt was gone! And Uncle George's studs! What would Aunt Ella say?

He sat down on the edge of his berth, trying to grasp this odd turn of events. Somebody had taken a violent dislike to his having that shirt. Who? The owner probably. That was it; the owner had recognized his property at the time of the search, and now— But who was the owner? Well, he could find that out in the morning from Tatu.

He yawned. It was all very confusing. Why should this mysterious stranger come to claim his property in the silent night? Why, having regained it, should he toss it on the chill Pacific's bosom? Had all this any connection with Jim Bachelor's dollar?

Questions—questions. All very confusing. One thing was certain—O'Meara had been lying. Bill yawned again; his berth looked warm and inviting. He rose, turned out the light, left dress-

ing gown and slippers in the middle of the floor, and was soon deep in slumber.

Bill Hammond was awakened the next morning by the noise of Mikklesen singing in the bath. The Englishman had a fair voice, through which at the moment rang a note of triumph natural to one who was securely locked in and had the plumbing all to himself.

"The same old story," Bill muttered, "Britannia rules the waves." He looked at his watch—8:30—high time to be up and doing.

If he knew Mikklesen, however, it would do him no good to hurry. He lay where he was, watching the fresh salt breeze flutter the curtain at his porthole. Outside was a clean blue world, an empty world. Restful this cruising on a yacht.

Something pleasant had happened—ah, yes, Sally. She loved him. Other things had happened, not so pleasant. That little luck piece he had sworn to find. Might be more of a job than it had looked last night in the moonlight with Sally by his side. Somebody had it; somebody who knew only too well its value and was guarding it against the time when it could be traded in for a goodly supply of its little playmates. Somebody—but who?

He thought of Henry Frost, with his foolish story of a collar shortage. He thought of O'Meara, falsifying with the ease that comes from long practise, on the quiet deck at half-past one in the morning. He thought of the man who had invaded his stateroom, fleeing with that dress shirt in his arms. Uncle George's studs were floating far, journeying to some romantic port. A South Sea Islander, no doubt, would wear them next—in his ears, or maybe his nose. What would Aunt Ella say?

Aunt Ella's reactions, however, were unimportant just now. He had agreed to assume the role of detective and his course was clear. He must discover the owner of that vanished shirt.

He rang for Tatu and, while he waited, rattled at the door leading to the bath. Not that he expected to gain anything by it, but it relieved his feelings.

Tatu entered, minus his accustomed smile. The boy was worried; there could be no mistake about that.

"Very much trouble today," he announced. "Dollar gone. All Japanese boys catch hell. You want something, please?"

"How about taking back that shirt?" Bill looked at him keenly.

"Yes-s," said Tatu. All expression left his face.

"Well, you can't. It was stolen from me in the night."

"Yes-s," said Tatu.

No surprise; no interest even. Did Tatu know all about the shirt, or was this just his Oriental stoicism? Bill stared at him, and Tatu stared back. And the Occidental felt suddenly hopeless and helpless.

"Look here, Tatu," he said, "this is very important. I want to know where you got that shirt."

Tatu looked at the berth, at the bathroom door, through the porthole, at the ceiling, then back to Bill. "Forget," he said.

"What? Say, don't try that on me!" Bill was annoyed. "Now we'll start all over again. Where did you get the shirt?"

"Forget," said Tatu.

A wonderful people, the Japanese. Bill Hammond managed to control himself.

"You told me a minute ago you would return it. How could you return it if you don't know where you got it?"

"Forget," said Tatu.

East is East and West is West. They stood facing each other, the Occidental glaring, the Oriental staring. Bill Hammond turned away. Never get anywhere by losing his temper. Patience, amiability might do the trick.

"All right, Tatu," said Bill. "You and I won't quarrel. You helped me out of a tight place last night and I appreciate it."

"Most welcome," Tatu assured him, busily brushing Bill's dinner coat.

An idea flashed into Bill's mind.

"I tell you, that fix I was in was no joke. And I understand I wasn't the only one in trouble. I hear that Mr. Frost came aboard with no extra collars." He paused. Tatu brushed industriously. "Yes, sir, I hear that when he came to dress he didn't have any more collars than a bathing suit."

Tatu laid down the coat.

"Mr. Frost have plenty collar," he said.

"Oh, he did?" Bill sought to appear casual. "I guess I didn't get it straight then. Well supplied with collars, was he?"

"Very big box. Maybe ten. Maybe twelve. Plenty."

"You don't say!"

"I lay him out. I know."

Bill turned away lest his face betray him. Here was news!

Henry Frost's story disproved already. It certainly began to look as though this Hammond boy was a born detective.

"The morning is okay, Tátu," he remarked, staring out the porthole. "When do we get to Monterey?"

"Maybe not go to Monterey," said Tatu. "Anything else, please?"

"Not go to Monterey? What are you talking about?"

"Things very bad this nice morning," answered Tatu. "Hear bell ringing. Yes-s. Thank you." And he bowed out.

Bill turned again to the bathroom, silent now. He rattled the knob, called, but there was no answer. Donning dressing gown and slippers he stepped out into the corridor, warm with honest anger. He knocked at Mikklesen's door.

The Englishman opened it.

"Ah, good morning," he said. "What can I do for you?"

Bill was proud of himself. A grand thing, self-control.

"I believe," he said, "that you and I are supposed to share that bathroom fifty-fifty."

"Certainly, old chap," agreed Mikklesen. "Anytime you feel inclined."

The struggle this time was a bit more difficult, but again Bill won.

"Then will you please unlock the door?" he said through his teeth.

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Frightfully careless of me. Just a moment." And Mikklesen closed his door in Bill's face.

The reporter reentered his cabin and managed to spring into the bathroom before Mikklesen had regained his own quarters.

"I'd like to see you today sometime," he said to the Englishman.

"Really? I fancy we'll run into each other. Bound to on a yacht. I mean to say, rather closé quarters."

"You never spoke a truer word. You know, I'm supposed to get an interview from you—for my paper."

"Fancy! You're a pressman then?"

"I work on a newspaper, if that's what you mean."

"Not really? It wouldn't be done in England, you know."

"What wouldn't be done?"

"I mean to say, inviting a pressman as a guest. How extraordinarily confusing!"

"Well, I'll give you time to get a grip on yourself before we start the interview," Bill answered. "And now, if you don't mind, even

a pressman prefers to bathe in private."

Bill's resentment was shortlived, and by the time he had finished shaving he had decided that maybe he wouldn't exterminate Mikklesen, after all. Perhaps the fellow served some useful purpose. Who could say? He whistled cheerfully as he dressed, though yesterday's shirt was nothing to whistle about. However, he had it on good authority that clothes don't make the man, and he sincerely trusted that all aboard had heard that one.

In the dining room he found Mrs. Keith and O'Meara breakfasting together. They appeared to be on excellent terms, and not particularly pleased at the sight of Mr. Hammond's shining morning face.

"Good morning," said the reporter. "We seem to be rather late."

"Frightfully," admitted Mrs. Keith.

"Natural result of staying up half the night," went on Bill. "Late hours make late breakfasts, eh, O'Meara?"

"Was Mr. O'Meara up late?"

"I ran into him on deck at one thirty this morning," smiled Bill.

"Yes, and it's lucky you did," growled the lawyer. He turned to Mrs. Keith. "This kid had a funny dream about seeing somebody in his stateroom," he explained. "I had a terrible time quieting him and getting him back to bed."

Mrs. Keith smiled sweetly on Bill.

"So you have queer dreams," she cooed. "How thrilling! You must tell me all about them. By the way, I hope you play golf. I'm looking for someone to take me round the Del Monte links this morning."

"Look no further," Bill said.

"Oh, that's awfully good of you," Mrs. Keith smiled.

"I mean," Bill added hastily, "you're not going to Monterey."

"What's that?" O'Meara cried. "Where are we going?"

"Don't ask me," Bill answered. "All I know is, we'd have been at Monterey long ago if that had been our destination."

"But—I thought it was all settled," O'Meara objected.

Julian Hill came in. He was fresh as the morning in spotless linen. O'Meara at once applied to him for information.

"It's quite true," said Hill. "We're not bound for Monterey—or any other port. We're just cruising."

"Just cruising?" O'Meara repeated.

"Just wandering about the ocean," Hill went on, "playing for time."

"I don't get you," the politician said.

Hill smiled. "You know Jim Batchelor as well as I do. He's lost something—something of great importance—to him. And he's not the sort of man to land his servants and crew—and his guests—until he's been over each and every one with a vacuum cleaner. Yes," added Mr. Hill, looking hard at O'Meara, "I'd advise the man who has that dollar to hand it over. Or we may not get back to town this year."

O'Meara stood up.

"It's an outrage!" he cried. "Oh, of course I know how Batchelor feels. But this isn't fair to those of us who happen not to be thieves." And he in turn looked hard at Julian Hill. "I've got to be back in town by Monday morning," he added.

"It's all very exciting, at any rate," purred Mrs. Keith. She, too, rose, and they went out together.

"It begins to look as though there might be an opening here for a first-class detective," Bill Hammond ventured.

"Not at all," Hill answered coldly. "Mr. Batchelor is quite competent to manage his own affairs." The rest was silence.

His breakfast over, Bill went in search of Sally. He found her in the dazzling sunlight on the afterdeck, and not minding it, hers being that sort of complexion.

"Hello," he said. "This is a surprise!"

"What are you talking about?" she wanted to know.

"When I'm away from you I keep thinking how lovely you are. Then I see you, and you're even lovelier than I thought. That's why I say—"

"Yes, but Bill, where in the world have you been?"

"Eating breakfast. Did you miss me?"

"I certainly did."

"Fine!"

"Are we in this detective business together, or are we not? I'm dying to know what you've found out."

He told her of his interview with Henry Frost and of his more recent discovery regarding the collars. A puzzled little frown wrinkled her otherwise perfect brow.

"I can't understand it," she protested. "Henry Frost is Father's dearest friend."

"Always dangerous—dearest friends," Bill told her. "How is your father, by the way?"

"Worried to death. He claims he didn't sleep a wink, and I be-

lieve him. The first night without his luck piece in thirty-seven years. I told him you were on the job and all about the wonderful evidence you've run down in the course of newspaper work. I was quite eloquent, really."

"Good! I hope you'll always be eloquent when discussing me."

"I always shall, I'm sure."

"You darling! Go on, expand that idea, please."

She seemed about to obey, but at that moment Jim Batchelor joined them.

He appeared nervous and upset.

"Good morning, Hammond," he said. "Sally's told me that you're willing to help in this unfortunate affair."

"Well, if it's not presumptuous of me—"

"Nonsense! You've had more experience in this sort of thing than I have, and I'll be glad of your assistance. Besides"—he glanced about him—"it's rather a hard thing to say about one's guests; but—well, I trust you, my boy." The emphasis on the "you" was marked.

"That's very kind of you, sir. May I ask what steps you have taken in the matter?"

"The servants and the crew have all been questioned. They've been carefully searched, and their quarters, too. I may say that I don't suspect any of them. Sometime during the day guests' cabins and luggage will be—er—examined. I'm hospitality itself, but this is a vital business for me and I'll stop at nothing. I've given orders to the captain not to put in anywhere. There are supplies aboard to carry us for five days, and I'll stay out that long if I have to."

"It's a good idea, sir," Bill agreed.

"I've also just posted a notice offering a reward of three thousand dollars for the immediate return of my luck piece, and no questions asked. 'Immediate' is the important word there. The money's yours if you run down the thief."

"Oh, but I wouldn't take your—money, sir," Bill said. The emphasis on the "money" was not so marked as he had intended.

"Rot! Why not? I'd be getting off cheaply at that. Three thousand is a small price to pay for the peace of mind the return of that dollar would bring me. My boy, I'll never know a happy moment until I get it back."

"Bill, why don't you tell him?" Sally suggested.

"Tell me what?" Jim Batchelor asked quickly.

"Bill's unearthed the most amazing things, Dad. You'll never believe—"

"Good lord, why keep me in the dark?" He was all excitement. "What's up?"

"If you don't mind, sir," Bill said, "I'd like just a little more time before I let you in on it. You see—"

"Well—if you say so. But only a little time. Don't keep me waiting."

"I'll make it snappy, sir," said Bill, and hurried off.

Tatu, making up the berth in Henry Frost's cabin, informed him that Frost had slept late and was now at breakfast.

Bill looked round inquiringly. "How about the collars, Tatu?"

"Him lock collars in suitcase," Tatu explained. "Put key in pocket."

Smiling to himself, Bill went to the dining room, where his employer sat alone at his breakfast.

"Good morning, sir," said Bill.

"Good morning. You breakfast late." Frost's tone implied that it was a bad sign.

"I've had my breakfast, Mr. Frost. I want to speak to you, if you don't mind."

"And if I do mind?"

"I'll have to speak anyhow," said Bill firmly. Henry Frost looked up sourly from his grapefruit.

"I'll say this for you: You're the most offensive man on my payroll."

"I'm sorry, sir. I'm only trying to do the right thing."

"People who are only trying to do the right thing generally make fools of themselves. What is it now?"

"Last night I told you I didn't intend to go to Mr. Batchelor with certain information I had picked up. I've been forced to change my mind."

"Really? What forced you?"

"That story of yours about the collars. I've found out it wasn't true."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. You say you went to Jim Batchelor's room for a collar. I say that's a typographical error. You went there for a dollar."

Henry Frost rose and tossed down his napkin.

"Will you come with me?" he said.

"Certainly, sir." Bill followed his employer on deck. "This is all very painful for me, Mr. Frost."

"Yes, more so than you think. Do you happen to know where Jim Batchelor is?"

"He's on the afterdeck."

Henry Frost turned in that direction.

"Regarding that interview with Mikklesen, you needn't trouble. You're not on the paper any more."

"Just as you say, sir," Bill replied smilingly.

But his heart sank. In love and out of work—a great combination.

Jim Batchelor was waiting with Sally where Bill had left them. He looked up eagerly as the two men approached.

"Jim, I've got something to say to you," began Frost.

"All right. What is it?"

"This young idiot thinks I took your dollar."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Batchelor, disappointed in Bill. "I know you wouldn't take it."

"Well," continued Mr. Frost, "I—I—" His face turned scarlet. "As a matter of fact, Jim—I did."

Jim Batchelor leaped from his chair.

"What's that? Say that again!"

"Now, Jim, don't get excited. I give you my word; it was all a joke."

"A joke! You old simpleton! Getting funny at your age! Well, hand it over!"

"I want you to understand how it was," Frost continued. "I was determined to take you out and trim you at golf today. Last night somebody happened to say something about your losing that dollar, and it came over me all at once that if you did you'd be so upset you'd be easy picking on the golf course. So just for fun, Jim—that was all—I slipped into your room and substituted that other dollar."

"You're a criminal at heart, Henry. I always knew it. But where in Sam Hill—"

"Of course I never dreamed you'd take it so seriously. And I want to talk to you about that. Really, Jim, that dollar's become an obsession with you. No man ought to build his whole life on a thing like that. It's wrong—all wrong. Let this be a lesson to you."

"Will you cut out the sermon and give me the dollar?"

"I'll get it. It's in my room. There's no hard feelings, Jim—"

"There will be if you don't shut up and get that dollar."

Frost departed. Jim Batchelor stalked the deck. He was mad and he showed it.

"The old idiot!" he stormed. "What's got into him? Second childhood, I call it. A joke! You heard him—he said it was a joke!"

"Never mind, Dad, it's all right now," said Sally soothingly. "And you must remember, it was Bill here solved the mystery."

"Mighty clever of him, too. I'll write him a check in a minute."

"Oh, I couldn't allow that, sir," Bill protested. "Not under the circumstances."

"Rot! Just as serious as a real theft. And for that matter—who knows? The old fox! I never did trust him."

"Dad! Your best friend?" Sally was shocked.

"Well, how do I know what he's up to?"

At that moment Mr. Frost reappeared. For once his famous poker face failed him.

"Jim," he said, "I feel like a fool."

"You're certainly acting like one. Where's my dollar?"

Frost slowly extended his bony hand. Eagerly Jim Batchelor reached out a hand to receive. Into it Henry Frost dropped—a bit of paper, a greenback, the promise of the United States Government to pay one dollar on demand.

"What the devil's this?" roared Batchelor.

"I found it in the place where I'd hidden your dollar, Jim," said Henry Frost humbly.

Jim Batchelor did not speak. He threw the paper dollar to the deck. His face purpled, so that Bill Hammond wondered what one did first in case of apoplexy.

"What can I say, Jim?" Frost pleaded. "I wouldn't have had this happen for a cool million."

"Apologies!" gurgled Batchelor. "Regrets! What do I care for them? I want my dollar!"

"It was all a joke," said Frost—an unfortunate remark.

"Yeah, a joke! Ha-ha! Fine joke! Somebody else thought so, too. Somebody decided to steal your stuff. And now where are we? Just where we started!"

"With this difference," said Frost. "I'm in on this now. You and I will run the thief down together. I've something at stake, too, and my first move will be to add a couple of thousand to that reward you offered."

"A lot of good that will do," shrugged Batchelor. "If three thousand wouldn't bring it, five won't either. I tell you, we're up against it." He turned suddenly to Bill. "You—you haven't any other clue, have you?" he asked. The trustful note in his voice was pathetic. It made two young people very happy.

"Well, I have one," Bill admitted.

"You have?" Batchelor brightened at once.

"Yes; it may not be very important. But I'll work on it. I'd like your permission to do whatever I think necessary—to search other people's staterooms if I think best."

"Go as far as you like." Batchelor turned to Frost. "This boy's promised to help me."

"Oh, he's a wonder!" sneered Frost.

"You bet he is," Batchelor answered. "He ran you down in record time, and I'll back him to get the other thief."

"Dad!" Sally reproved.

"All right, Jim," said Frost. "I've got it coming to me."

"I'll say you have!"

Bill bent over and picked up the greenback from the deck.

"I'll take charge of this, if you don't mind. And by the way, Mr. Frost, did anybody else aboard know you took that dollar?"

"Yes—come to think of it," said Frost. "It seemed best, in case my motives should be misunderstood, to let a second party in on the—er—the joke. So I told Julian Hill."

"When did you tell him?"

"Last evening—before I took it. And afterward I mentioned to him that I had it in my stateroom."

In the silence that followed, Bill had a vision of the night before—two tables of bridge, with Julian Hill wandering alone somewhere outside.

"By the way," said Batchelor, "this may not mean anything; but I heard this morning that Mrs. Keith lunched last Wednesday at the Palace with Blake. The Blakes are old rivals of mine," he explained to Bill, "and they've never made any secret of their interest in that dollar."

"And who told you about Mrs. Keith, sir?"

"Julian Hill."

"Ah, yes," Bill smiled. "Well, I'll do my best."

"I'm sure you will, my boy," said Batchelor. "Don't forget, there's five thousand in it for you now."

I hope there's more than that, thought Bill.

He smiled at Sally and moved away. Frost called after him.

"By the way, Hammond," he said, "if you get the time you'd better do that Mikklesen story. Simon Porter will be expecting it."

"Thank you, sir," Bill answered. Sally joined him and they went forward along the rail.

"What did he mean, Bill?" she asked.

"Oh, he was just handing me back my job. You see, he fired me a little while ago. Now he loves me again. And speaking of that, where do you stand this morning?"

"Just where I stood last night," she told him.

"The day of miracles arrived last night," he said. "You can sit down now, my dear—if you'll tell me all about it."

"All about what?" They found a couple of deck chairs.

"About how you—like me pretty well."

"Never mind that. You tell me. You love me, don't you, Bill?"

"Sally, words are inadequate! I gave 'em a chance last night, and they fell down on the job."

"When did you start, Bill—being fond, I mean?"

"That day you were helping orphans. The moment I saw you—honest, Sally, I loved you on the spot. And for ten minutes I madly worshiped you. Then somebody told me your name. So I went away and never loved you again."

"Bill!"

"Well, that was the idea. Only it didn't work out very well."

"I'm glad it didn't. But business before pleasure, Bill. What's your other clue?"

His bright look faded.

"It isn't any good," he said. "I thought for a minute there might be something in it. I see now I was wrong."

"But what is it, Bill?"

"It's a shirt."

"A shirt?"

"Yes, we've run the collars to earth, and now we'll get busy on the shirt. I tell you, Sally, this is beginning to look to me like the annual outing of the Laundrymen's Benevolent Society."

"You interest me strangely. What's it all about?"

He told her. The misadventure in the steamy laundry of Honolulu Sam, his agony when he found himself shirtless. Tatu's prompt rescue, the theft in the night, Tatu's reticence on the morning after—all these he detailed at length.

"The trouble with the detective game," said Sally, when he had finished, "is that it's so full of mystery. Whose shirt do you imagine that was?"

"Well, there's Julian Hill. He appears to have an extensive wardrobe."

"Bill, you don't think that Julian—"

"I don't know—just a guess. My job now is to get hold of Tatu and pry the information out of him."

"Japanese are difficult," said Sally.

"You bet they are, and this boy is Gibraltar's little brother. But I'll make him open up."

"I'm sure you will."

"I'll get the facts out of him if I have to strangle him," Bill told her, "just to prove to you how tenderly I love you."

But Bill Hammond's optimistic prediction failed to come true. He did not get the facts from Tatu. After fifteen minutes of the third degree, the little Japanese still stood firm as Gibraltar—maybe firmer. Bill cajoled, pleaded, threatened. Tatu looked at him with all the calm mystery of the Orient in his eyes, and suavely protested that he had forgotten just where he acquired that shirt. The luncheon bugle came as a merciful interruption.

"All right, go along," said Bill. His efforts had wilted him. "But I'm not through with you, my lad."

"Yes-s, thank you," answered Tatu, and had the audacity to smile as he went out.

Near the door of the dining room Sally was eagerly waiting.

"Well?" she asked.

"Salute your hero," said Bill. "He's just been licked by a Japanese."

"Tatu wouldn't tell you?"

"Adamant, that boy. He's never heard the word, but he can act it out."

"Why not set Father on him?"

"No," protested Bill, "let's keep Father out of it. I've got to do this alone. You know why."

"But what are you going to do?"

"Just what a regular detective would do," he told her. "Wait for a lucky break."

"Is that the way they work?" she asked, unbelieving. She was all for action—her father's daughter.

"It certainly is," said Bill. "I read an interview once with a great French detective. I didn't pay much attention to it at the time, as I didn't know then that I was going into the business. But I remember one thing—he said that the detective's chief ally was luck."

"But suppose you're not lucky?"

"Something that happened last night," smiled Bill, "proved I'm the luckiest man in the world."

Jim Batchelor came up.

"What's doing?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I'm working." Bill tried to make it sound businesslike.

"Results—that's what we want," Batchelor reminded him.

"You bet we do," said Bill, and they went in to lunch.

At the table there was little of the cheery animation of the night before. The guests ate in preoccupied silence, and Jim Batchelor's intimation that they might wander about the Pacific for several days added nothing to the general gayety.

After lunch Bill Hammond saw Mikklesen enter the smoking room and followed. He sat down opposite the Englishman and offered him a cigar.

Mikklesen took it suspiciously and lighted it in the same spirit. Although it was a perfectly good cigar his subsequent expression seemed to indicate that his worst fears were realized.

"If you've no objection," Bill said, "we might as well get that interview over with."

"As you wish," Mikklesen agreed. "Where's your notebook?"

"My what? Say, it's only in plays that reporters carry those things."

"But I shouldn't care to be misquoted," the Englishman objected.

"Not a chance. I've got a mind like a phonograph record."

"Ah—er—what shall I talk about?" Mikklesen asked.

"Give me something snappy," Bill suggested. "Something they can hang a headline on."

"Oh, but that's hardly my style. Very bad taste, sensationalism. We have practically none of it at home. If you don't mind, I'd like to talk about India."

Mikklesen told his story. Beyond question he had the gift of speech, and Bill Hammond reflected as he listened that he was getting something. By an adroit question now and then, he led the talker on. Some ten minutes had passed when suddenly the

second officer of the *Francesca*, who had charge of the yacht's wireless, entered.

"Mr. Hammond," he said, "a message for you."

"Oh, thanks," said Bill. The officer handed it over and departed. "Pardon me just a second."

"Certainly," agreed Mikklesen.

Bill opened the folded paper and read what the second officer had set down. As he read, he smiled happily to himself. The message was from Simon Porter.

"Never mind interview," Simon had wirelessly. "Have investigated by cable. A little black sheep who's gone astray. Kicked out of the English colony in Yokohama because they didn't like his shirts."

His shirts! Oh, lady luck!

"Anything important?" inquired Mikklesen.

"Not at all," said Bill. "Go on, please. You were saying—"

Mikklesen went on, but Bill no longer listened. The interview was cold, but the quest of the dollar was warming up. His shirts! They didn't like his shirts. Well, that might mean much or little; but Mikklesen's shirts certainly must be looked into.

"I fancy that's about all I can give you," said the Englishman finally.

"That's plenty," Bill answered heartily. He stood up. "You know, considering how fond you are of the Orient, I'm surprised you came away."

Mikklesen regarded him with a sudden interest.

"Pater's getting old," he explained. "Cabled me to come home. Couldn't very well refuse—family ties and all that. But sooner or later I shall return to the East."

"I'm sure you will," said Bill. "Thanks a lot."

Eagerly he hurried below. Things were certainly looking brighter. Midway down the passageway he encountered Tatu.

"I want you," he cried, and seizing the Japanese by the arm escorted him energetically into the cabin.

"What now, please?" inquired Tatu.

Bill pointed an accusing finger.

"That was Mikklesen's shirt," he announced.

"Somebody tell," said Tatu, with obvious relief.

"Yes, somebody's told. That lets you out. Now come across with the whole story."

"Nothing to say," Tatu replied. "I see he have two dress shirt."

You have no dress shirt. I hear him talk unkind remarks about Japanese people. I take shirt. Why not?"

"It was a noble impulse. But why the dickens wouldn't you tell me this before?"

"Last night, maybe twelve o'clock, Mr. Mikklesen ring," Tatu explained. "Tell me I take shirt, give to you. I say no, indeed. He say very well, but will give me fifty dollar I not tell to you whose shirt you have. I accept with pleasure." His face clouded. "Japanese boy lose fifty dollar," he added.

"Has he given it to you?"

"Give one dollar for a beginning. Very small beginning."

Bill's eyes narrowed.

"Let me see the dollar," he demanded. Tatu handed over a crisp new greenback. "You're sure this is the one?"

"Yes-s. Only dollar in pocket," said the Japanese.

Bill took out a silver dollar, glanced at it, and handed it to Tatu.

"I'll trade with you, if you don't mind. Now listen, my lad! From now on you and I are friends."

"Yes-s. Very nice," agreed Tatu.

"You stick to me. I'm helping Mr. Batchelor—he's asked me to. No more secrets with Mikklesen: Otherwise trouble for you—much trouble."

"I know."

"The first thing in order is an examination of Mikklesen's remaining shirt."

"Can't do," Tatu said. "Shirt locked up."

"I suppose so," Bill replied. "However, I'm going to take a look. Go and see if there's anyone in Mikklesen's cabin."

Tatu departed through the bath. In a second he was back.

"Empty," he announced.

"Fine," said Bill. He stationed Tatu in the corridor with orders to signal if the Englishman appeared. Then, with the bath offering a way of escape, he examined the room with care. But Mikklesen had left no dress shirt where eager hands could find it. Undoubtedly it was in the one piece of luggage that was securely locked—a huge battered bag that had a London lock.

"Nothing doing," said Bill finally. He returned to his own cabin, followed by Tatu.

"You want bag open?" inquired Tatu.

"It would be a good idea," Bill admitted.

"Maybe dollar inside," suggested the boy.

"It might be."

"Pretty strong lock," mused Tatu.

"Oh, so you noticed that?" Bill stared at the impassive face. "Well," he continued, thinking aloud, "my chance will come. It's bound to. Mikklesen's got to wear that shirt tonight, and perhaps— Oh, good lord—"

"Yes-s," said Tatu.

"Look here, my boy, what do I wear tonight? I'm worse off than I was last night. I haven't even got any studs."

"Excuse, please. Hear bell ringing," lied Tatu, and departed in great haste.

Bill Hammond sat down on his berth to consider developments. So it was Mikklesen's shirt he had worn so jauntily the evening before. Then it must have been Mikklesen who came in the night to reclaim his property. Knowing himself closely pursued, he had not dared turn into his own cabin, once he reached the corridor, and for the same reason he had thrown the shirt overboard. But why all this fuss about a dress shirt? And how, Bill asked himself, was it connected with Jim Bachelor's dollar, as he was sure now it must be. Well, detectives certainly earned their pay.

Bill left the cabin and returned to the upper deck. The *Francesca* appeared to be deserted. He dropped into a chair that stood invitingly in a shady spot and began to consider his problem. Must get into that bag of Mikklesen's. But how?

Heavy footsteps sounded on the deck and O'Meara passed by. He did not speak or turn his head. He appeared worried. Bill Hammond began to worry, too. Was he wasting time on a false trail? O'Meara, Julian Hill, Mrs. Keith—all possibilities. Ought to be looking them up a bit, too.

But no. For the present he would follow that shirt, see where it led. He'd get into Mikklesen's bag. How would a regular detective go about it? Break open the lock perhaps? No, too crude. Find out where Mikklesen kept his keys? Much better. Find out?—how?

It was a rather drowsy afternoon, and a full twenty minutes passed before Bill had an idea. He rose at once to try it out. When he reached the smoking room Mikklesen was just leaving.

"Hello," Bill said. "I've been thinking about that story of ours. We really need a few photographs to dress it up."

"Oh, no, old chap," said Mikklesen hastily. "I shouldn't care for that at all."

"I don't mean pictures of you," Bill explained. "Just some snapshots taken in the Orient. You surely have some of those."

"Well, as a matter of fact, I have," admitted Mikklesen. "I'll give them to you later."

"But if you don't mind"—Bill summoned his most winning smile—"I'm at work on the story now."

For a moment Mikklesen stood regarding him.

"Oh, very well," he said, "come along."

He led the way below and Bill followed close, determined to miss nothing now. When they reached the Englishman's cabin Mikklesen took a bunch of keys from his pocket. Bill Hammond tried not to look too interested.

"I keep my bag locked," Mikklesen explained. "Things disappearing right and left, you know."

"It's the only safe thing to do," Bill agreed.

The Englishman bent over his bag.

"Look there!" he cried.

Bill looked. The lock on Mikklesen's bag had been smashed open.

"How beastly annoying!" The Englishman's face was crimson with anger. "This is too much, really it is. I understood I was to go on a cruise with gentlefolk, not with a band of thieves." He was hurriedly investigating the contents of the bag.

"Anything missing?" Bill asked.

"There doesn't appear to be," said Mikklesen, cooling off a bit. "But whether there is or not I shall certainly complain to our host." He took out an envelope and glanced into it. "The photos, old chap. Pick out what you want and return the rest, if you will."

"Surely," Bill agreed. He waited hopefully. "If you'd like me to stay here and keep an eye on things while you look up Mr. Batchelor—"

Mikklesen stared at him. Did he imagine it, or was that the ghost of a smile about the Englishman's lips?

"Thank you so much," he said. "But I shall ask Mr. Batchelor to come to me here. I won't leave my cabin again this afternoon—if you're interested."

If you're interested! Now what did he mean by that? Did he know that Bill was on to him, or was it a shot in the dark?

"Oh—er—of course—" said Bill lamely, and departed.

Back in his own room, Bill tried to think things out. What did "if you're interested" mean? And who had broken the lock on that

bag? Evidently Mikklesen wasn't the only shady character aboard.

He took out a book and settled down in his berth to read, his ear attuned to eventualities in the next cabin. Would Mikklesen keep his word and remain on guard by his mysterious shirt? An hour passed, and it began to appear that such was the Englishman's intention.

It was, as has been noted, a drowsy afternoon. Bill dropped his book and lay back on the pillow. Ah, this was the life! No harsh call from Simon Porter sending him out on a bit of legwork on the hard pavements. No feverish hurry to make the last edition. Nothing but the soft swish of water, the thump of the engines—sounds that suggested slumber. Bill accepted the suggestion . . .

He was awakened sometime later by a sharp knock on his door. Leaping up, he opened it. A servant stood outside.

"Mr. Hammond, you're wanted above sir."

Wanted! What now? Some new development in the matter of the dollar, no doubt. He hastily brushed his hair and went to the upper deck. At the top of the companionway he encountered Aunt Dora, looking extremely competent.

"Ah, Mr. Hammond," she said, "I hope I haven't disturbed you. We've a table for bridge and we lack a fourth."

Trapped! Bill looked wildly to the right and left.

"I—I thought it was something important," he stammered.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I mean—you don't want me. I'm a terrible player—as you have reason to know."

"Practice makes perfect. I'll give you a few pointers."

"It's awfully good of you, but—I'm very busy and—my eyes aren't in very good shape."

"I noticed your failing eyesight," she answered, "last night when you trumped my ace of spades. However, we'll put the table in a strong light. Come along."

"I—I'll be very happy to," said Bill, surrendering.

Aunt Dora didn't care whether he was happy or not. She had him. He wasn't her ideal bridge player, but he was all she could get. Bill followed her into the lounge, praying to see Sally.

But he didn't. Julian Hill and Henry Frost sat glumly at a table, their manner that of captive slaves on Caesar's chariot wheels. Aunt Dora sat down and the game was on. It proved a long and painful session. At the close of each hand Aunt Dora halted

the proceedings while she delved into the immediate past, pointing out to one and all the errors of their ways. Bill got a lot of undesirable publicity out of these little talks.

The dinner hour was not far away when Sally came in and released him. When they left the lounge Aunt Dora was going strong. Mr. William Hammond, it seemed, had done something for which he should have been drawn and quartered.

"She'll never forgive me," said Bill. "I got her signals mixed."

"I'm afraid she's rather tiresome at times," Sally smiled.

"Well, she will insist on crossing her bridge after she's got well over it. There are people like that."

"You were good to play, Bill," Sally said.

"Yes, but I didn't play so good, and I wasted a lot of time when I should have been sleuthing."

"Has anything happened?" she inquired.

"I should say it has. It was a big afternoon up to the moment I met your aunt." He told her of Simon's cable and the accident to Mikklesen's bag. "Things are moving," he added.

"They seem to be," she admitted. "What are you going to do now?"

"Ah—er—something very bright, you may be sure. I'm keeneyed and alert. My brain is hitting on all twelve."

"Yes, but what are you going to do?"

"My dear, don't be so literal. Can it be you don't trust me?"

"Oh, I know you're simply wonderful. Only—"

"Never mind the only. We're on the verge of big things."

His manner was confident, but by the time he had reached his cabin his confidence had begun to wane. He stood for a moment wondering just what his preparations for dinner were to be. No evening clothes tonight, that was certain. He would have to make some sort of apology to Jim Batchelor and let it go at that. At any rate, he had appeared properly clad the night before, and the other guests could draw their own conclusions regarding his appearance tonight.

He tried the door into the bath—locked, of course. He rattled and called—there was no sound within. Have to go and open the door again. As he paused outside Mikklesen's cabin something told him not to knock. He entered very quietly.

The cabin was empty and in semidarkness. He moved farther into the room—and his heart stood still. A white blur in the dusk—Mikklesen's dress shirt! It was lying on the settee under the porthole, within easy reach.

He put his hand down and touched it, and as he did so a faint sound in the bath startled him. He drew his hand back from the shirt, but in that brief second he had made an interesting discovery. Mikklesen appeared in the bathroom door.

"Good lord!" he cried. "You gave me a shock! What are you doing here? Confound it all, is there no privacy aboard this yacht?"

"I'm sorry," said Bill. "I din't know you were in the bath, and I was coming through to unlock it. I thought you'd gone off and left it that way—it wouldn't be the first time, you know."

"Well, I happen to be using it," said Mikklesen testily, and the fact that half his face was lathered and he carried a razor seemed to bear him out. "In the future, I'll thank you to knock before entering my cabin."

Bill considered. He had Mikklesen where he wanted him, but his sense of the dramatic told him to bide his time. Better an unmasking in Jim Batchelor's presence than a scene with only two people in a half-dark cabin.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "Sorry I disturbed you."

"It's rather upsetting," complained Mikklesen. "First my bag broken into and then you popping up like a ghost." He followed Bill to the door and shut it after him in a manner suggesting extreme annoyance.

Out in the corridor Bill gave himself up to a moment of unalloyed joy. It was almost too good to be true. Too easy. A bright lad, this Mikklesen; but not too bright for young Mr. Hammond, the peerless detective. For Bill knew where the dollar was now!

He must have a word with Jim Batchelor before he staged his big scene. He tiptoed down the passage and knocked at the multimillionaire's door. Batchelor called an invitation to enter, and when he did so he was glad to find that Sally also was in the room. She was tying Batchelor's dress tie, for she was a faithful daughter and didn't like Tatu's work as a valet. Her father broke from her ministrations at sight of Bill.

"Something doing?" he inquired, with pathetic eagerness.

"I'll say there is," replied Mr. Hammond cheerily.

"You've got it?"

"I've got it located—same thing."

"Not quite." Batchelor's happy look faded. "However, where is it?"

"That'll be revealed at the proper moment," Bill told him. "I

just dropped in to prepare you for a little scene after dinner tonight. Sally, I'm glad you're here. After the coffee you're to take your aunt and Mrs. Keith from the dining room and leave us men alone."

"What—and miss the excitement? Not much!"

"Sally, you heard what Mr. Hammond said," reproved her father. "Obey."

"But, Dad—"

"Sally!"

"Oh, well, if you think Mr. Hammond knows best," smiled Sally.

"I'm sure he does."

"I'm sorry, Sally," Bill said. "But the subsequent events will be such that I don't think it the place for the so-called weaker sex. Mr. Batchelor, I want you to back me up from that point on. Anything I say—and anything I propose to do."

"Of course. But you might give me a little hint—"

"I will, sir." He handed over Simon Porter's wireless message. "Read that, please."

Batchelor read.

"Who's he talking about? Not—Mikklesen?"

"Yes, sir, Mikklesen."

"Good lord! I never thought of him. What about his shirts?"

"You wouldn't believe if I told you, sir. I'll show you after dinner."

"Fine!" Batchelor's spirits rose. "I'll be mighty glad to get this thing solved tonight. The captain's just told me there's something wrong with the engines, and we're circling back to Monterey."

He submitted while Sally put the finishing touch on his tie.

"By the way, Mikklesen called me into his stateroom this afternoon and put up a terrible howl because his bag had been broken into. I was very sympathetic. I didn't tell him the captain did it."

"Oh, the captain broke the lock?"

"Yes; pretty crude work. He swore he could pick it open with a jackknife, but his hand slipped and he ended by smashing it. I didn't approve of his going quite that far."

"Did he find anything?" asked Bill.

"Nothing. He went over the thing carefully—so he claims."

"He didn't have the combination," smiled Bill. "By the way, sir, I won't dress for dinner tonight. I'll come as a plainclothesman, if you don't mind."

"Come in your pajamas if you want to," said Batchelor. "Only get me that dollar."

"I'll get it," Bill assured him. As he left the cabin he smiled triumphantly at Sally and Sally smiled back.

The conquering hero—that was how he felt.

A tense air hung over the dinner table that evening, as though all present knew that some important development in the dollar chase was close at hand. Only one guest was entirely at ease—Mikklesen. He resumed his tale of far corners and strange adventures, and once more Bill Hammond had to admit that Mikklesen was good.

When the women had left, a pointed silence fell. Jim Batchelor sat for a moment staring at the end of his cigar.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I know you'll pardon my mentioning again the matter of the missing dollar, for I'm sure you're all as interested as I am to see the property recovered. Mr. Hammond has been making an investigation, at my request, and I understand he has something to report."

They turned with interest to Mr. Hammond. Bill smiled cheerily.

"We've made several discoveries," he began. "For instance, we know that the dollar was taken from Mr. Batchelor in the first place as a rather ill-advised joke." Frost squirmed in his chair, but Bill mentioned no names. He told how the unfortunate jokester, on seeking to return the dollar to its owner, had found in the hiding place a greenback of equal value. He took the bank note from his pocket.

"This is a brand-new note," he said, "and its serial number is 2B7654328B. Some of you may have noticed that when you are paid money by a bank, and receive new bills, the serial numbers usually follow in perfect sequence." He removed another bill from his pocket. "I have here," he added, "another new dollar, and the serial number is 2B7654329B. Is it too much to suppose that the two notes came from the same pocket?"

"Good work!" remarked Batchelor, beaming. "Where'd you get that other one?"

"The second note," Bill explained, "was given to Tatu, the valet, in return from some trifling service. It was given to him by one of you gentlemen here present." He paused. No one spoke. "It was given him by Mr. Mikklesen," Bill added.

They all turned and looked at the Englishman. His nonchalance was admirable.

"That may be true," he smiled, "I may have given him that note—I don't recall. What of it?"

"Pretty flimsy, if you ask me," said O'Meara. "I'm a lawyer and I want to tell you, young man—"

"Just a moment, Mr. O'Meara," Bill smiled. "We don't need a lawyer just yet. I recognized that this evidence is rather inconclusive. I mentioned it merely because it makes a good prelude to what will follow. The close relationship of these notes points to Mikklesen. Other things point to Mikklesen. I point to Mikklesen. I ask him to stand up and be searched—that is, of course, if Mr. Batchelor has no objection."

Batchelor nodded. "Go to it," he said heartily.

"Fine!" Bill said. "Now, Mr. Mikklesen, if you'll be so good—" Mikklesen flushed.

"This is an insult," he protested. "Mr. Batchelor, I appeal to you. The simplest laws of hospitality—"

"You've abused my hospitality, sir," said Batchelor. "I know all about you. Stand up!"

Slowly the Englishman got to his feet.

"The coat, please," Bill Hammond ordered. "Thanks. Now the collar and tie. I'll help you, if you don't mind." He rapidly unfastened the studs in Mikklesen's gleaming bosom. "Our friend here," he explained, "has made a close study of his profession. He has perfected the Mikklesen shirt, for which he was famous in the Orient. The bosom is unusually stiff; it holds its shape well. And at the bottom, on the left side, an extra strip of linen makes a convenient pocket. You wouldn't notice it if the shirt were freshly laundered—I didn't"—he smiled at Mikklesen—"but after prying it open you have a handy receptacle for carrying slender booty—banknotes, or even a silver dollar. And the loot doesn't show, particularly if you are built concavely."

Bill removed from the bosom of the shirt a silver dollar and tossed it to Jim Batchelor. His heart was thumping; this was his big hour. "Your luck piece, I believe, sir," he said.

Batchelor's eyes shone.

"My boy, how can I ever thank you—" he began. With trembling hand he picked up the dollar. A hoarse cry of rage escaped him. He threw the dollar back onto the table and got to his feet. "Damn it," he cried, "how long is this thing going to keep up?"

"Wha-what thing, sir?"

"That," roared Batchelor, "is not my dollar! It was coined in the year 1899."

"Good lord!" cried Bill; and glancing at Mikklesen he saw on that gentleman's face a look of undisguised surprise.

The room was in an uproar, everybody talking at once. But above the clamor Batchelor's voice rang out. He was facing Bill, and he was talking to Bill.

"You a detective! You're a defective, that's what you are! You get my hopes up, and then you—you—"

"I'm sorry, sir," poor Bill said. He was a bit dazed.

"Sorry! What kind of talk is that? Sorry! I could—I'd like to—I tell you this, you unearth more dollars for me, and I'll skin you alive!" He turned to Mikklesen, who was tying his necktie as best he could without a mirror. "And you, sir! What have you to say? What explanation have you to offer? Honest men don't go about with trick shirts. I know your reputation in the Orient. How come that dollar was where it was?"

"I'm afraid I've been done, sir," said Mikklesen suavely, putting on his coat.

"Done? How so?"

"Under the circumstances I can't do better than tell you the truth. If you will pause to consider, there has been no real theft. In each case, nothing but substitution—one dollar for another. The value of your luck piece is purely sentimental. Remember that, if you will."

"Go on," said Batchelor.

"I went to your cabin last night to get that dollar. I'm a bit of a jester myself. I heard Mr. Frost at the door and had just time to reach the closet. From there I watched him make the substitution. I followed him, and when he left his cabin to go to dinner I slipped in. After locating your dollar I made a little substitution of my own. I had your dollar last night, I had it this morning—right where our young friend here found this other one. I put the shirt with the dollar in it in my bag and securely fastened the lock. Mr. Hammond here will bear me out when I say that sometime in the early afternoon my bag was broken into and the lock was damaged. That must have been when the dollars were exchanged."

"Nonsense!" answered Batchelor. "You mean to say you haven't made sure of that dollar since?"

"I felt that there was still a dollar in the bosom of the shirt and naturally supposed it was the—er—luck piece."

Jim Batchelor slowly shook his head.

"I don't get you," he said. "You're too deep for me. However, I know one thing—you're not the sort of guest I care to have around. Something has happened to the engines and we're turning back to Monterey. In the morning you will greatly oblige me by taking your luggage and going ashore."

"Oh, naturally," Mikklesen agreed calmly.

"After you've been searched," Batchelor added. "Shall we join the ladies?"

As they left the dining room, Bill Hammond saw O'Meara seize Mikklesen's arm and hold him back. The politician's ruddy face was a study in various emotions, none pleasant.

Entering the main lounge last, Bill encountered Sally just inside the door. Her eyes were shining with excitement as she maneuvered him outside.

"Oh, Bill, I felt dreadfully," she said. "I mean, to miss your big scene of triumph."

"Ha-ha," he remarked mirthlessly.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Some triumph, Sally! A dud! As a detective I'm a great reporter." And he told her what had happened.

"What did Father say?" she inquired when he had finished.

"Ah," he answered, "you go right to the heart of the matter. Father said plenty, and if a look ever meant poison in the coffee, his look meant that to me. I tell you, Sally, it's all over now. As far as Father goes, I'm out."

"Don't give up," she urged. "Haven't you any more clues?"

"Well," he replied slowly, "a little one."

"I knew it!" she cried. "What is it, Bill?"

"Oh, nothing much. But I happened to pick up that dollar we found on Mikklesen, and—"

Jim Batchelor and Henry Frost emerged from the lounge and came up.

"Ah," said Frost sarcastically, "the young detective."

"Don't kid him, Henry," said Batchelor. "The boy's got a future. He can dig up more dollars than John D. Rockefeller."

"Mr. Batchelor, I certainly regret—" Bill began.

"Never mind that. Where are we now? Things are more confused than ever."

"If you'll take a suggestion from me," Frost began, "how about your captain? He opened Mikklesen's bag. Was he alone at the time?"

"Nonsense!" Batchelor answered. "You're wrong as usual, Henry."

"Well, I don't know. What's all this about the engines and turning back?"

"Rot, I say! The captain's been with me for more than ten years." Batchelor shook his head. "I tell you, I'm up a tree. A lot of things I don't understand. Very strange, for example, that Mikklesen should have made that confession. He could have denied everything and let it go at that."

"Dad," said Sally, "Bill's got another clue."

"I suppose so," her father replied. "He certainly is a marvel for clues. I shouldn't be surprised if he conjured a dollar out of somebody's ear next. But it won't be my dollar, I'm sure of that."

"If you'll give me another chance, sir," suggested Bill.

"Well, you're a broken reed, but you're all I've got to lean on. What is it now?"

"Mikklesen's luggage was broken into about two thirty. He didn't discover it until after three. The captain couldn't have been in there more than ten or fifteen minutes. What happened in the interval between the time the captain went out and Mikklesen came in?"

"Tell me that and I'll say you're good."

"I can only surmise, sir. But that 1899 dollar we found on Mikklesen—I know who had it last."

"What? You do?"

"Yes. That's the dollar I gave Tatu this morning in exchange for the greenback he got from Mikklesen."

"Tatu! That's an idea! Come into the smoking room and we'll have Tatu on the carpet."

The owner of the *Francesca* led the way, and Frost, Hammond, and Sally followed. Tatu, summoned, appeared a bit lacking in his accustomed calm. He feared his employer, and showed it.

"You've seen this dollar before, Tatu," said Bill, holding it out. "I gave it to you this morning. What did you do with it after that?"

Tatu stared at the silver dollar.

"Give him back," he said.

"Back to whom?"

"Mr. Mikklesen."

"The truth, Tatu," Batchelor demanded.

"So help," answered the Japanese. "Mr. Mikklesen say I do not keep promise. That not true. Make me give dollar back."

That was Tatu's story and he stuck to it. After a few moments of further questioning, Batchelor let him go.

"Well, where does that get us?" he wanted to know.

"Tatu's lying," declared Frost.

"I don't think so," Bill objected. "No, something tells me he speaks true. Mr. Batchelor, that big confession scene of Mikklesen's was staged with a purpose."

"What purpose?"

"To lull our suspicions once and for all. I've a hunch he's still got your dollar."

"Where?"

"That's for me to find out, sir." Bill was again the man of action. "Sally, I wish you'd go in and lure Mikklesen into a bridge game. After that's under way I'll act."

"You sound good," admitted Batchelor. "But then you always do. I wish I could be sure you'd get the right dollar this time."

"I'll get it," said Bill. His heart sank. He'd said that before—with what result? But this time he must make good—he must! However, he wasn't so sure.

When he saw the Englishman uncomfortably settled as Aunt Dora's partner in a game, he hurried below. Without hesitation he turned on the light in Mikklesen's cabin and began to search. He did a thorough job—under the carpet, in the closet, everywhere. But he found no dollar. Nothing at all of interest, in fact, save a little coil of flat wire which lay on the floor almost under the berth. It seemed of no importance, but he put it in his pocketbook.

His heart was heavy as he turned out the light and started to leave via the bath. He had one foot in the bathroom and the other in Mikklesen's cabin when the door into the corridor opened.

"Hello," said a voice—O'Meara's—very softly.

Bill fled. He silently took the key out of the door leading from the bath into his room, and, safe in his cabin, fastened the lock from that side. He laid his hand gently on the knob of the door and waited. Footsteps sounded faintly in the bathroom and then the knob began to turn slowly in his hand. He let it turn. A gentle shake of the knob, and then the footsteps receded. As soon as

he dared, Bill unlocked the door and opened it an inch or two. He made out the occasional glimmer of a flashlight in Mikklesen's cabin.

For a time O'Meara searched industriously. Suddenly the flash went dark. Someone else had entered Mikklesen's cabin. Who? In a moment the politician enlightened him.

"Mrs. Keith?" he said in a low voice.

"Mr. O'Meara!" came the woman's answer.

"What can I do for you?" O'Meara inquired sarcastically.

"Is this your cabin, Mr. O'Meara?" she asked, equally sarcastic.

"It is not."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Just what you're doing. Looking for that dollar."

"Why, Mr. O'Meara—"

"Cut it out. I was on to you early in the game. See here, our interests are the same. Let's work together."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Oh, yes, you do. You're here to get that luck piece for the Blakes; and I—well, I represent other interests; interests that want to keep Jim Batchelor out of the primaries. Let me have that dollar until next Wednesday at six P.M. and you can have it after that."

"But I haven't got it, Mr. O'Meara."

"I know you haven't. I mean, in case we can get hold of it."

"You think it's in this room?"

"I think Mikklesen's got it somewhere. You know, I had my deal all fixed with him. I caught him last night throwing a shirt overboard, and after a little talk he admitted he had the luck piece and agreed to deliver it to me in Monterey for twelve hundred cash."

"I thought of making him an offer myself," said the woman. "I knew his talents of old, and I was sure he had it."

"It's just as well you didn't. This morning, when Batchelor offered that whale of a reward, the dirty crook began to hedge. He'd have double-crossed me then and there, only I threatened to have him arrested before he could get out of the state. So he held off."

"Then that performance tonight was all staged?"

"It sure was," O'Meara said. "I could see it in his eye. It was all for my benefit. I wouldn't be surprised if he led that young fool of a Hammond right into it. He wanted me to think he'd lost the dollar. Probably he's figuring on getting ashore with it, and then

sending it to Batchelor by a messenger. But only over my dead body. Let's get busy."

"Where does this door lead?" asked Mrs. Keith.

"Into a bathroom. There's a door into another cabin, but it's locked."

And it was, for Bill Hammond took the hint just in time. He went to the upper deck and left them to search, confident that it would have no results.

The bridge game was just breaking up, with enthusiastic cooperation of everyone save Aunt Dora. Bill took Sally aside, but before he could say anything her father joined them.

"Anything doing?" he inquired.

Bill told them of the conversation in Mikklesen's cabin. Jim Batchelor was indignant.

"Fine business!" he said. "O'Meara, and the woman, too! I knew blamed well I couldn't trust anybody on this boat. Well, they'll go ashore, bag and baggage, with Mikklesen in the morning. But not until I've been over all three of them personally."

"Father!"

"Yes, I mean it. Well, Hammond, where are we now? Mikklesen's still got the dollar, you think? But where's he got it?"

"Well—" began Bill.

"You've got a clue, of course."

"Not one," Bill answered sadly.

"What?" Batchelor stood up. "Well, if you've run out of clues, then the skies are dark indeed. Something tells me I'll never see my dollar again. You may be a good newspaperman, my boy, but as a detective—well—oh, what's the use? I'm going to bed. Good night."

Sally and Bill followed him outside. In a shadowy spot on the deck they paused.

"Oh, Bill, what are we going to do now?" the girl sighed.

"Well, I have one—one little clue. But it's so silly I didn't have the nerve to tell him about it. Just a little coil of wire I found in Mikklesen's cabin."

"What would that mean, Bill?"

"I don't know. But I'm going to think tonight as I never thought before. I can't lose you, Sally. I won't—that's all."

"Not if I have anything to say about it, Bill, you won't," she answered, and the wisdom of stopping in a shadow became at once apparent . . .

In his berth Bill settled down to do the promised thinking. He began to go over in his mind, carefully, every point in the possessions of a man like Mikklesen. But somewhere in the neighborhood of the military brushes he fell asleep . . .

There is a subconscious self that never sleeps, but applies itself to any problem in hand. Which probably explains why Bill awoke the next morning with the hunch of his life. It was very late; and struck by an unaccustomed quiet, he looked out the porthole. The little town of Monterey and the green forest of Del Monte met his gaze, and he knew the *Francesca* had reached port.

The bathroom door was unlocked, and the door leading into Mikklesen's cabin stood open. There was no trace of the Englishman, nor of his many pieces of luggage. Alarmed, Bill rang for Tatu; but from him he learned that no one had yet gone ashore.

"Hurry," Bill ordered, "and tell Mr. Batchelor not to land anyone until he hears from me." And he prepared himself for a busy morning.

Jim Batchelor arrived just as Bill was putting on his necktie.

"Any news?" inquired the young man.

"Not a glimmer," answered Batchelor. He sat down on the berth, his gloomy face in striking contrast to the sunny morning. "The second officer was in Mikklesen's cabin while he dressed and examined everything he put on. We've been through his luggage again, too. But there was nothing doing. Either he hasn't got that dollar or he's too smart for us."

"Where is he now?" Bill asked.

"He's on deck, waiting to go ashore. The launch is ready. O'Meara and Mrs. Keith are there, too."

"Did you search them?"

"Well, no. There are limits. Besides, I'm sure they're just as much in the dark as I am. Both of them came to me this morning and said they wanted to leave the cruise here, so I simply told them to go. There seemed no occasion for a row."

"You were quite right, sir," Bill agreed.

"You sent me word not to let anybody land until you came up."

"I did," Bill smiled.

"Are you—are you on a new trail?"

"I think so."

"My boy! No, no, I mustn't let you get my hopes up again."

"You're very wise, sir," Bill admitted. "This isn't much—a fighting chance, that's all."

"Well, let's fight it," said Batchelor as they left the cabin. "I tell you again, you get that dollar back and there'll be nothing too good for you."

"Careful!" said Bill under his breath, and they went on deck.

Sally joined them, as lovely as the California morning, but with a worried look in her eyes. Bill smiled his reassurance. They moved along the deck and came upon Mikklesen, O'Meara, and Mrs. Keith sitting amid their luggage.

"We're losing some of our guests," said Batchelor.

"So I see," Bill answered. "I'd steeled myself to part with Mikklesen, but these others—I'm awfully sorry—"

O'Meara glared at him. Henry Frost, alert for news, came up.

"Mr. Batchelor," Bill went on, "before Mikklesen goes out of our lives forever, I'd like to ask him one question."

"Certainly. Go to it."

"Mr. Mikklesen"—the Englishman stood up, and he and Bill faced each other—"Mr. Mikklesen," Bill repeated, "what time is it?"

The Englishman's eyes narrowed.

"I don't understand."

"The time—by that watch of yours. I've seen you consult it before. Why not now?"

"My dear fellow"—Mikklesen was quite at ease—"it's a frightfully old thing, really. Belonged to my grandfather. Something has happened to it. It's not running."

"Not running? That's too bad." Bill held out his hand. "Let me have a look at it. I might be able to fix it."

Mikklesen's eyes turned quickly to right and left. He appeared to be measuring the distance between the *Francesca* and the shore.

"Come on," said Bill. "There's no way out. Hand it over."

"Why not?" said Mikklesen. He took from his pocket a large ancient timepiece and unfastened it from the chain. He was smiling. Bill's heart sank—was he wrong, after all?

His strong fingers closed eagerly on Mikklesen's watch. Anxiously he opened the back. The thing was packed with tissue paper. He lifted out the paper—and smiled, for underneath lay a silver dollar.

"I hope it's the right one this time," he said, and handed it to Batchelor.

"By the Lord Harry!" cried Batchelor. "My luck piece! The first

dollar I ever earned. Little secret mark and all. My boy—my boy, I take back all I said."

Bill glanced at Sally; her eyes were shining. He handed the watch back to Mikklesen.

"When you took out the works," he said, "you shouldn't have let the mainspring get away from you. Lively little things, mainsprings. Elusive, what?"

"I fancy so." Mikklesen, still smiling, still nonchalant, restored the watch to his pocket. "Mr. Batchelor, I'll toddle along. There's been no actual theft."

"Who says there hasn't?"

O'Meara, purple with rage, was on his feet. "Batchelor, you turn this crook over to me. I'll put him behind bars, where he belongs."

Jim Batchelor shook his head. "Your passion for justice is splendid, O'Meara," he said, "but I prefer it otherwise. Publicity never did appeal to me. Mr. Mikklesen, I congratulate you. You must have been a wonder at hide and seek when you were a kid. You may as well—go along."

"Thanks, awfully," said Mikklesen. "It's been a frightfully jolly cruise, and all that." He glanced at O'Meara, and his smile faded. "I'm going to ask one last favor, if I may."

"Well, you've got your nerve," Batchelor said. "What is it?"

"Will you be so good as to send me ashore alone, and let the launch return for—these others?"

The owner of the *Francesca* laughed.

"Of course I will," he replied. "I can't say I blame you either. It isn't always safe for birds of a feather to flock together. Get into the launch. And you, O'Meara"—he put himself in the angry politician's path—"you stay where you are."

Mikklesen indicated his luggage to a sailor and hastily descended the ladder. The launch putt-putted away. O'Meara moved to the rail and shook a heavy fist.

"I'll get you," he cried, "you lowdown crook!"

Mikklesen stood in the stern of the launch and waved a jaunty farewell. He was off in search of new fields and better luck.

"Oh, Mr. Batchelor," purred Mrs. Keith, "it's a woman's privilege to change her mind, you know. If you have no objection I'll stay with the party."

"Oh, no, you won't!" said Batchelor. "I've got my dollar and I intend to hang onto it."

"Why, what do you mean?" she said, staring at him with wide innocent eyes.

"I'm on to you—and O'Meara, too. I'm sorry you've forced me to say it. Go back to your friends the Blakes, Mrs. Keith, and tell them they've got me to lick on that India contract—if they can. As for you, O'Meara, my name will be entered in the primaries next week. And I'm glad to know where you stand."

"What's it all about?" O'Meara inquired blandly.

"You know very well what it's about. The second officer has some errands in the town, but he'll be back with the launch in an hour or so. When he comes I'll ask you both to leave the *Francesca*." Batchelor turned and his eyes lighted on Bill Hammond. Smiling, he put his arm about Bill's shoulder. "Some detective, if you ask me. Come into the lounge, son. There's a little matter of business between us. Henry, you're in on this. Got your checkbook?"

"I've got it," said Frost, and he and Sally followed the pair into the main lounge.

"Two thousand from you, Henry," Batchelor reminded him.

"I know it." Mr. Frost reluctantly sat down at a desk.

"Wait a minute," Bill said. "I don't want any money, sir."

"What do you want?" asked Frost.

"A better job."

"And he deserves it, too," said Batchelor.

"Well," began Frost, whose first instinct was always to hedge, "I don't like to interfere at the office—" Still, his expression seemed to say two thousand is two thousand.

"The Sunday editor quit last week," Bill went on. "A word from you and the job's mine."

Frost stood up. "All right," he agreed. "We'll consider the matter settled." He patted his checkbook lovingly and departed.

"Now that was sensible," beamed Jim Batchelor. "A job—a chance to make good. Better than money."

"It looks better to me," smiled Bill. "You see, I'm thinking of getting married."

Batchelor got up and seized his hand.

"Fine! Fine!" he cried. "My boy, I wish you all the luck in the world."

"Then you approve of it?"

"The best thing that could happen to any young man. A balance wheel, an incentive."

"That's the way I feel, sir," said Bill heartily.

"And it does you credit." Batchelor sat at the desk. "My little check will come in the way of a wedding present." He stopped. "I hope you're getting the right sort of girl?"

"I'm sure of that, sir."

"Of course you feel that way. But these modern girls—not the kind I used to know. Flighty, extravagant—they don't know the value of a dollar."

"This one," said Bill, "knows the value of a dollar. At least, she ought to."

"What's that?" cried Batchelor.

"Put away your checkbook, sir," said Bill. "It isn't your money I want."

Batchelor threw down his pen. "I—I didn't dream—Sally, what about this?"

She came and sat on his knee.

"Dad, you've never refused me anything yet. You're not going to haggle over a little thing like Bill."

"But—but I don't—this young man—why, he hasn't anything!"

"What did you have when you were married?" she asked.

"I had my brains and a strong right arm."

"So has Bill," she told him.

He turned slowly and looked at Bill. "I like you, my boy—I won't deny it. But a girl like Sally—it isn't so much the initial expense—it's the upkeep. Could you manage it?"

"With your permission," said Bill, "I'd like to try."

Batchelor kissed his daughter and stood up.

"You'll have to give me time on this," he said. "All so sudden. I'll think it over."

"Yes, sir," Bill answered. "And in the meantime—"

"In the meantime—" Batchelor stopped at the door. He looked at Bill Hammond long and wistfully. "You know," he said, "I'd give a million dollars to be where you are now." And he left.

"Poor Dad," said Sally. "Isn't he a darling?"

"It runs in your family," Bill told her. "I've noticed that."

"Bill, you'll always love me, won't you?"

"Love you—and keep you close," said Bill. "In the big moments of my life you'll give me courage to go on. The first wife I ever earned."

"Bill, be careful!" she said. "Somebody might come in."

Michael Collins

No One Likes To Be Played for a Sucker

Here is the first short story about Dan Fortune, the one-armed private eye—a rara avis of a yarn that is not only semi-hardboiled and reminiscent of the heyday of "Black Mask" but involves a private eye in an unlikely private-eye situation—a genuine, 24-carat, dyed-in-the-blood locked-room mystery. But there is no principle of tec technique that prohibits a blending of intellectual pursuit and procedural investigation.

Detective: DAN FORTUNE

It can be a mistake to be too smart. Deviousness takes real practise; judgment of human nature as fine as a hair, and something else—call it ice. The ice a man has inside him.

Old Tercio Osso came to me with his suspicions on a Thursday morning. That alone showed his uneasiness. Old Tercio hadn't been out of his Carmine Street office in the morning for 20 years—not even for a relative's funeral.

"Business don't come and find you," Tercio pronounced regularly.

Osso & Vitanza, Jewelry, Religious Supplies and Real Estate, and if you wanted to do business with Tercio, or pay your rent, you went to his office in the morning. In the afternoon Tercio presided in his corner at The Mazzini Political Club—a little cards, a little *bocci* out back.

Lean old Cology Vitanza, Tercio's partner of thirty years, reversed the procedure, and at night they both held down the office—thieves struck at night on Carmine Street, and there was safety in numbers.

It was Cology Vitanza that old Tercio came to me about.

"We got troubles, Mr. Fortune. I think Cology makes plans."

The old man sat like a solemn frog on my one extra chair. He wore his usual ancient black suit, white shirt, and black tie with its shiny knot so small it looked as if it had been tied under pressure. The shabbiness of my one-room office did not bother Tercio. On Carmine Street, no matter how much cash a businessman has in various banks, he knows the value of a shabby front: it gives the poor confidence that a man is like them.

"What kind of plans?"

Tercio shrugged. "Business it's not good. We make some big mistakes. The stock market, buildings not worth so much as we pay, inventory that don't sell."

"I didn't know you made mistakes, Mr. Osso."

"So?" Tercio said. "Maybe I'm old. Vitanza he's old. We lose the touch, the neighborhood it's change. The new people don't buy what we got. Maybe we been playin' too much *bocci*, sit around tellin' too many stories from the old days."

"All right," I said. "What plans do you figure Vitanza makes?"

Tercio folded his plump hands in his broad lap. "For six years Cology got no wife. He got ten kids what got lotsa kids of their own. We both gettin' old. We got insurance, big. We talk about what we do next year and after and we don't think the same, so? Then I see Cology talking to people."

"What kind of insurance have you got?"

"On the inventory, on both of us, for the partners."

I sat back in the gray light from my one air-shaft window. "You're saying you think Vitanza is making plans to collect on the insurance?"

"I see him talk to Sid Nelson yesterday. Three days ago he drinks coffee alone with Don Primo."

Don Primo Veronese was a lawyer, a member of the Mazzini Club, and, by strong rumor, a fence for small hoods. Sid Nelson was a hood, not small but not big—sort of in between. A thief, a killer, and a careful operator.

"You and Vitanza talk to a lot of people."

"Sure, I talk to Don Primo myself," Tercio agreed. "I don't talk to no Sid Nelson. I don't say we should make a special inventory. I don't take big money from the bank, put in envelope, carry in my pocket. I don't go to Mass five times in one week."

"What do you want me to do, Mr. Osso?"

A slow shrug. "In winter the wolf comes into the streets of the city. The old lion got to learn new tricks or starve. Maybe I'm

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crazy, okay. Only you watch Cology. You be a detective."

"That's my work," I said. "All right, a hundred in advance."

"A horse works on hay," Tercio said, and counted out two nice crisp fifties. "You tell me nine o'clock every night."

After old Tercio had gone I rubbed at the stump of my missing arm, then phoned Lieutenant Marx at the precinct. I told him Tercio's story.

"What do you want me to do?" Marx said.

"I don't know," I said. "Tell me that Tercio Osso is a smart old man."

"Tercio is a smart old man," Marx said. "All I can do is stand by, Dan. At least until you get something that can be called reasonable suspicion."

"I know," I said.

"You can check out most of it," Marx pointed out.

That's what I did. I checked out Osso's story.

It checked. Other people had seen Cology Vitanza talking to Don Primo, and, especially, to Sid Nelson. The firm of Osso & Vitanza was in trouble—cash tied up, notes overdue, interest not paid, a few bad deals the other Carmine Street financiers were grinning about, and the jewelry stock not moving at all.

Vitanza had been going to Mass almost every day. He had withdrawn \$5,000 in cash. (A teller I knew, and ten bucks, got me that information.) I had to take Tercio Osso's word about the special inventory of the unmoving stock, but I was sure it would turn out true.

I began tailing Cology Vitanza. It wasn't a hard tail. The tall old man was easy to follow and a man of routine. He never took me out of the ten-square-block area of Little Italy. I reported to Osso every night at nine o'clock by telephone.

On Friday I spotted Vitanza talking again to Sid Nelson. The hoodlum seemed interested in what Vitanza had to say.

I ate a lot of spaghetti and drank a lot of wine for two days. I saw one bad movie, and visited the homes of twenty old men. That is, Vitanza visited and I lurked outside in the cold getting more bored every minute. I wore out my knees kneeling at the back of a dim church.

But I was in The Capri Tavern at six o'clock Saturday night when Vitanza stopped to talk to a seedy-looking character in a rear booth. A white envelope passed from Vitanza to the seedy

type. I waited until the new man downed his glass of wine and ambled out. Then I switched to tailing him.

I followed the seedy man through Little Italy and across to the East Side. He looked around a lot, and did all kinds of twists and turns, as if he figured he might be followed. That made it hard work, but I kept up with him. He finally headed for the Bowery.

A block south of Houston he suddenly ducked into a wino joint. I sprinted and went in, but he was out the back way and gone. I went around through the alleys and streets of the Bowery for another hour trying to pick up his trail, but I had no luck.

I went back to Carmine Street to find Cology Vitanza. He wasn't at The Mazzini Club, and neither was Osso. I tried their other haunts and didn't find them. The lights were on behind the curtained windows of the shop and office on Carmine Street, but I couldn't go in without tipping my hand, so I took up a stakeout.

Nothing happened for half an hour. Then some people tried to get into the store, but the front door was locked. That wasn't right for a Saturday night. It was almost nine o'clock by then. I made my call to Osso from a booth where I could watch the front of the store. There was no answer, so I called Lieutenant Marx.

"I don't like how it sounds," Marx said. "Too bad you lost that Bowery character. I've done some checking on their insurance. They've got \$50,000 on the inventory, \$25,000 life on each payable to the other, and \$50,000 surviving-partner insurance with option to buy out the heirs."

"A nice haul," I said. "What do we do?"

"Sid Nelson hasn't moved. I put a man on him for you."

"The Commissioner wouldn't like that."

"The Commissioner won't know," Marx said, and then was silent a few seconds. "We've got no cause to bust in yet."

"And if nothing's wrong we tip off Vitanza."

"But they shouldn't be locked up on Saturday night," Marx said. "The patrolman on the beat ought to be suspicious."

"I guess he ought to," I said.

"I'll be right over," Marx said.

Marx arrived with two of his squad inside three minutes. He'd picked up the beat patrolman on the way. I joined them at the door to the store. We couldn't see anything through the curtains.

"Pound the door and give a call," Marx instructed the beat patrolman.

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The patrolman pounded and called out. Nothing happened. Marx chewed his lip and looked at me. Then, as if from far off, we heard a voice. It was from somewhere inside the store, and it was calling for help.

"I guess we go in," Marx said.

He kicked in the glass of the door and reached inside for the lock.

At first we saw nothing wrong in the jewelry store. Then Marx pointed to the showcases where the expensive jewelry was kept. They were unlocked and empty.

In the office in the back a rear window was open. A man lay on the floor in a pool of not-quite-dry blood. A .38 caliber automatic was on the floor about five feet from the body, toward the right wall of the office. There was a solid door in the right wall, and behind it someone was knocking and calling, "What's happen out there? Hey, who's out there?"

Marx and I looked at each other as one of his men bent over the body on the floor. It was not Tercio Osso, it was Cology Vitanza. Marx's second man swung the door of the safe open. It had been closed but not locked. It was empty.

Marx went to the solid door. "Who's in there?"

"Osso! He knock me out, lock me in. What's happen?"

Marx studied the door. There was no key in the lock. I went and searched the dead man. I shook my head at Marx—no key. One of Marx's men pointed to the floor.

"There."

The key was on the floor not far from the gun. I picked it up. It was one of those common old house keys, rough and rusted, and there would be no prints. Marx took the key and opened the door.

Tercio Osso blinked at us. "Mr. Fortune, Lieutenant. Where's Cology, he—"

Osso stepped out into the office and saw his dead partner. He just stood and stared. Nothing happened to his face. I watched him. If anything had shown on his face I would have been surprised. Everyone knew he was a tough old man.

"So," he said, nodding, "he kill Cology. It figure. The crazy old man! Crazy!"

"You want to tell us what happened?" Marx said.

"Sure, sure," the old man said. He walked to his desk and sat down heavily. I saw a trickle of blood over his left ear. He looked

at Vitanza's body. "He come in maybe hour, two hours ago. What time is it?"

"Nine twenty," Marx said.

"That long?" Osso said. "So two hours since. Seven thirty, maybe. One guy. He comes in the front. I go out to see. He got a mask and a gun. He push me back to office, me and Cology. He makes us go lock the front door, clean out the cases and then the safe. He work fast. He shove me in storeroom, knock me out."

The old man touched his head, winced. "I come to I don't know what time. I listen. Nothing, no noise. I listen long time, I don't want him to come back for me. Nothing happen. I hear phone ring. So I start yelling. Then I hear you bust in."

Osso looked around. "He got it all, huh? Out the window. Only he don't keep the deal, no. Cology a crazy man. A guy like that don't keep no deals."

There was a long silence in the office. Sirens were growing in the cold night air outside as the police were arriving. Marx was chewing his lip and looking at me. I looked at Osso.

"You're telling us you figure Vitanza hired a guy to rob the store for the insurance, and then the guy killed him? Why?"

Osso shrugged. "Who know? Maybe the guy don't want to split with Cology. Maybe the guy figures the jewels are worth more than a cut of the insurance. They fight, Cology's dead. How do I know, I'm locked inside the storeroom."

The Assistant Medical Examiner arrived, the fingerprint team, and two men from Safe and Loft. I went into the storeroom. It was small and windowless. There was no other door. The walls were white and clean, and the room was piled with lumber, cans, tools, and assorted junk. I found a small stain of blood on the floor near the door. The walls seemed solid.

When I went back out Marx's men had finished marking the locations of the body, the gun, and the key. The M.E. stood up and motioned to his men to bring their basket.

"Shot twice in the back," the M.E. said. "Two hours ago, maybe more, maybe a little less. Rigor is just starting. He's a skinny old man. Died pretty quick, I'd say. The slugs are still in him—.38 caliber looks about right."

"The gun's been fired twice," one of Marx's men said, "not long ago."

"Prints all over the place, all kinds," the fingerprint man said. "It won't be easy to lift them clean."

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Marx growled, "Prints won't help. What about you Safe and Loft guys?"

A Safe and Loft man said, "Rear window opened from inside. Some marks on the sill could have been a man climbing out. The yard is all concrete, no traces, but we found this."

The Safe and Loft man held up a child's rubber Halloween mask. Marx looked at it sourly.

"They all use that trick' now. The movies and TV tell 'em how," Marx said, and came over to me. He lit a cigarette. "Well, Dan?"

"Everything fits," I said. "Just about what I was supposed to figure that Vitanza was planning—except for his killing."

"Neat," Marx said.

"Too neat," I said. "Let's talk to Osso."

While his men and the experts went on working, Marx took Osso into the storeroom. I went with them.

"This is just what you expected when you went to Fortune," Marx said to the old man.

"I got a hunch," Osso said.

"What does Cology figure on getting out of it, Tercio?" I said. "The insurance on the stock, no more. Maybe he figures on keeping most of the jewels, too, okay. But figure what you get out of it. You get the whole works—stock insurance, life insurance on Cology, partnership insurance, option to buy it all."

"So?" Osso said, watching me.

"So if Cology was going to set up a risky deal like this it ought to be you who's dead, not him. The thief should have killed you and knocked Cology out. Then there's a big pie to split with Cology."

"You think I set this up?"

I nodded. "It smells, Tercio. We're supposed to figure that Vitanza hired a punk to fake a holdup, but not kill you when there was more riding on you than on the stock? Then the hired hood kills Cology for some reason and leaves his gun here on the floor? Leaves his mask out in the yard to prove he was here? Leaves the key on the floor so we know you were locked in?"

Osso shrugged. "You figure I set it up, take me down and book me. I call my lawyer. You find the guy I hire. You do that. I tell the truth. I hire no one, you won't find no one. I'm inside the storeroom, so how I kill Cology?"

Marx said, "It's too neat, Osso. You practically told Fortune how it was going to happen."

"So book me. I get my lawyer. You find the man I hire." And the old man smiled. "Or maybe you figure I kill from inside a locked room?"

Marx snapped, "Take the old man down, book him on suspicion. Go over the place with a vacuum cleaner. Send anything you find to Technical Services."

They took Osso. Marx followed and I left with him.

The police had gone, except for a patrolman posted at the broken door in front, when I jimmied the back window and went in. I dropped into the dark office and flicked on my flashlight. I focused the beam on the marks that showed where the gun, the key, and the body had been.

I heard the steps too late. The lights went on, and I turned from pure reflex. I never carry a gun, and if I'd had a gun I couldn't have pulled it with my flash still in my lone hand. I was glad I didn't have a gun. I might have shot by reflex, and it was Lieutenant Marx in the doorway. That's the trouble with a gun, you tend to depend on it if you have one.

I said, "You, too, Lieutenant?"

"What's your idea?"

"The old man seemed too confident," I said. "He just about begged you to book him on suspicion of having hired a man to fake the robbery and kill Vitanza."

"Yeah," Marx said, "he did. You think he didn't hire anyone?"

I nodded. I didn't like it, but unless Cology Vitanza had set it up after all, which I didn't believe, there had to be another answer. Marx didn't like it either.

"You know what that gives us," Marx said.

"I know," I said, "but Tercio's too smart to hire a killing and have a monkey on his back the rest of his life. No, he'd do it himself."

"You got more than a hunch, Dan?"

"The gun," I said. "It's the flaw in the setup. It sticks out. A thief who kills takes his gun away with him. Osso would know that."

"So?"

"So the gun's being in the office has to be the clue to the answer," I said. "It was here because Osso couldn't do anything else with it. The jewels are gone, the mask was out in the yard, the front door was locked on the inside out in the shop. If Osso

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had had a choice he'd have taken the gun away and the key, too. He didn't. Why?"

Marx rubbed his jaw. "So if he did it, it reads like this: he took the ice and stashed it; he planted the mask and left the rear window open; he killed Vitanza; and then he got into that storeroom, somehow got locked in with the key outside and a long way from the door."

"Yes and no," I said. "If he killed Vitanza *before* he got into that room, he could have disposed of the gun to make it look more like an outside killer. He didn't. So, somehow, he must have killed Vitanza from *inside* the locked storeroom."

"And then got the gun and key out?"

"That's it," I said.

Marx nodded. "Let's find it."

We went to work. The locked room is an exercise in illusion—a magician's trick. Otherwise it's impossible, and the impossible can't be done, period. Since it *had* been done, it must be a trick, a matter of distracting attention, and once you know what you're really looking for, the answer is never hard.

When we had dismissed the distraction—the hired robber-and-killer theory—the rest was just a matter of logic. I sighted along the line from the body to the seemingly solid wall. The line pointed directly to a light fixture set in the wall. Sighting the other way, the line led to Vitanza's desk and telephone.

"Vitanza came in," I said. "Osso was already inside the locked room. Vitanza went to his desk. He probably always did that, and Osso could count on it. Or maybe he saw that the jewels were gone and went to this desk to telephone the police. Osso probably knew he would be sure to do that, too. They'd been partners thirty years."

"And Osso shot him in the back," Marx said. "That's why the shots were in the back, the desk faces the other way."

"Let's look at that light fixture," I said.

It was one of those small modern wall-lamps with a wide circular metal base. It had been attached to the wall recently and was not painted over. The wall behind it sounded hollow, but we could not move the lamp.

"It doesn't come off, Dan," Marx said.

"Not from this side," I said.

We went into the storeroom. I measured off from the door to

exactly where the light fixture was attached on the other side of the wall. We studied the wall. The whole wall had been recently painted. The cans of quick-drying paint were among the litter in the storeroom. On the floor there were a few crumbs of dried plaster.

"Quick-drying plaster," I said to Marx.

Marx found a hammer and chisel in the storeroom. There were flecks of plaster on the chisel. He opened a hole directly behind the light fixture—it opened easily. The back of the light fixture was clearly visible about two inches in, between vertical two-by-fours. The fixture had a metal eye on the back. It was held in place by a metal bar that passed through the eye and was angled to catch the two-by-fours.

"That's it," I said. "Simple and clever."

Marx had two hands. He reached in with his left, turned the metal bar, and held the fixture. He pushed the fixture out and to the left and aimed his pistol through the hole with his right hand. He had a shot at the desk five feet away—in direct line with where the body of Cology Vitanza had fallen.

I said, "He had this hole open on this side. He heard Vitanza come in and head for the desk. He pushed out the fixture. It didn't matter if Vitanza heard or not—Osso was ready to shoot.

"He shot Vitanza, tossed the gun and key through the hole, pulled the fixture back and refastened it, plastered up the hole, and painted it. He knew no one would break in until after I called at nine o'clock. He hid here and waited.

"If we believed that Vitanza had set it up, fine, we'd be looking for a non-existent thief and killer. If we think Osso hired a man, fine, too. We're still looking for a non-existent thief and killer, and in a few weeks Osso cleans up this storeroom, and the new plaster sets so it can't be told from the old plaster. Maybe he fixed the light fixture so it's permanent in the wall. All the evidence is gone, and he's in the clear."

"Only now the lab boys should be able to prove some of the plaster is newer," Marx said, "the fixture moves out, and the evidence is in this room. We've got him!"

Marx called in Captain Gazzo of Homicide, and Chief of Detectives McGuire. They looked and listened, and McGuire got a judge to order the office and storeroom sealed. The D.A. would want the jury to see the office and storeroom just as they were when Vitanza was killed.

I gave my statement, Marx made his report, and Gazzo faced the old man with it. Osso was a tough old bird.

"I want my lawyer," Osso said.

He got his lawyer, they booked him, and I went home to bed. I felt good. I don't get many locked rooms to play with, so I was pleased with myself.

Until morning.

"It's not the gun," Captain Gazzo said.

I was in Gazzo's office. So was Marx. Gazzo held the .38 automatic that had been on the office floor—the gun that had been the tipoff, the weak link, the key to it all.

"This gun didn't kill Vitanza," Gazzo said. "Ballistics just reported. Vitanza was killed with a .38, but not this one."

I said nothing. Neither did Marx.

"A locked room," Gazzo said sarcastically. "Clever, very clever."

I said it at the start: it can be a mistake to be too smart. A locked-room murder is an illusionist's trick, a matter of the misdirection of attention. And the one who had been too smart was me.

"All he threw out was the key," I said. "That was all he had to throw out all along. The rest was to distract us."

There had never been any reason why Osso had to kill from inside the storeroom, only that he lock himself in from the inside and get the key out. The whole locked room had been just a trick to distract us. A gun on the floor by a dead man; the right caliber and fired recently and the right number of times. Who would dream it was the wrong gun?

"The key," Gazzo said. "First he's brought in on suspicion of having hired a man to fake a robbery and kill his partner. Next he's booked for having killed his partner from inside a locked room with a trick scheme. Now he killed his partner outside the room, switched guns, locked himself in, and just tossed the key out. What next?"

"He killed Vitanza," Marx said. "I'm sure he did."

"I'm sure, too," Gazzo agreed, "but what jury will believe us now with the speech his lawyer'll make about dumb cops and police persecution? You guys like fairy tales? How do you like the one about the man who cried, wolf? The D.A. is bawling on his desk thinking about facing a jury against Osso now."

"We'll find out what he did," Marx said. "We'll find the right gun and the jewels."

"Sure we will," Gazzo said. "Some day."

"And I bet it won't do us any good," I said.

It didn't. Three days after the killing the superintendent of a cheap rooming house on the Lower East Side reported that a tenant hadn't come out of his room for three days. The police broke in and found the man dead. It was the seedy character I had followed and lost.

He had been shot in the shoulder. The bullet was still in the wound. But that was not what had killed him. He had died from drinking methyl alcohol with a lot of lye in it. The bottle was in the room. The police found some of the missing jewels in the room, but not all. They also found a .38 caliber automatic that had been fired twice.

"It's the gun that killed Vitanza," ballistics reported.

"Only the bum's prints on the gun," fingerprinting said.

"It's certain he died four or five hours *after* Vitanza died," the M.E. said. "The bad whiskey killed him. He might have been unconscious most of the time, but after three days we'll never prove it. He lost blood from that shoulder wound."

Ballistics then added the final touch. "The bullet in the bum's shoulder came from the gun you found on the floor of Osso & Vitanza's office. The gun was registered to Cology Vitanza himself."

With my statement and report on what I had observed Cology Vitanza do, on the actions Osso had reported and I had checked out, the evidence logically added up to only one story: the seedy character had been hired by Cology Vitanza to rob the jewelry store. For some reason there had been a fight while Osso was unconscious in the locked room. (Osso stated he had plastered the hole in the storeroom the day before; with the evidence against the bum his story was better than Marx's and mine.)

Vitanza had wounded the bum, and the bum had killed Vitanza. Then the wounded bum had run for his room carrying the loot, hiding some of it. In his room, weak from his wound, he had drunk the bad whiskey, passed out, and died. It was just the way a wounded bum would die.

I had a different story. The day after they dropped all charges against Tercio Osso I went to his office. He didn't try to evade me.

"I owe you a couple days and expenses," Osso said.

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"You hired me in the first place just to make me and Marx suspicious," I said, "You figured I'd talk to the police and you knew we'd suspect a trick. You wanted us to accuse you right away of hiring someone to kill Vitanza."

Osso said nothing.

"You arranged all those suspicious acts of Vitanza's. It wouldn't be hard. You were partners, old friends, and he'd do anything you asked him to do if you said it was business. You asked him to talk to Sid Nelson about something innocent, to take out \$5,000 in cash for you, to meet the bum with a note, even to go to a lot of Masses."

The old man was like a fat black frog in the chair.

"You played us like trout. It was too easy and not smart for you to have hired a killer. We were sure to look for more. That's when you handed us the locked room and the gun on the floor."

Osso smiled.

"That gun would have made any cop wonder, and you expected us to figure out the locked-room trick. You wanted us to charge you with it, and you wanted time. You needed at least a few hours to be sure the bum was dead, and the locked room would keep us nice and busy for at least a few hours."

The old man began to light a thin black cigar.

"You killed Vitanza while I was trailing the bum. You took the jewels, locked up, went out the back window. You went to the bum's room and filled him with the bad whiskey, then shot him with Vitanza's gun. A wound that would bleed but not kill."

"Then you planted the gun that had killed Vitanza in the bum's room with some of the jewels. You knew no one would look for the bum for days. You went back to the office and laid out Vitanza. You put the gun that had shot the bum on the office floor. You locked yourself in the storeroom from the inside and tossed out the key through the light-fixture hole in the wall."

"Then you sat back and led me and Marx into being too smart for our own good. You got the time you needed. You kept us away from the bum until it was too late. You've got what you were after, and you're safe." I stopped and looked at the old man. "One thing I want to know, Osso. Why did you pick me?"

Tercio Osso took the black stogie from his mouth and laughed.

"You got one arm," Osso said, grinning at me. "You're easy to spot. I got to know where you are all the time to make it work, see? I got to make it easy for that bum to spot you and lead you a

chase before he loses you. And I got to make it easy for the man watching you all the time."

"You had a man watching me?"

"Sure, what else? Good man, a relative, never talk." Osso studied his cigar some more. "You got good friends on the cops, and you're a real smart man, see? I mean, I know you figure out that locked room."

And Osso laughed again. He was very pleased with his shenanigans. I said nothing, just stared at him. He studied me.

"I got to do it, see?" Osso said at last. "I'm in trouble. Vitanza, he don't agree with me no more. He was gonna ruin me if I don't stop him. So I stop him. And I fix it so you smart guys outsmart yourselves."

I stood up. "That's okay, Osso. You see, you made the same mistake Marx and I made."

"So?" he said, his black eyes narrowing.

"That's right. You forgot other people can be as smart as you. You fixed it good so that no one can prove in court what you did, but everyone knows you did it. You made it too complicated, Osso. You're the only one who could have worked it all. What I figured out, and just told you, I also told Vitanza's ten kids, and the members of the Mazzini Club. They're smart, too."

"I kill you, too!" Osso croaked.

"You couldn't get away with it twice, not with everyone knowing what you did. You're too smart to try. Bad odds, and you always play the odds."

I left him chewing his lip, his shrewd mind working fast. Who knows, he's a smart man, and maybe he'll still get away with it. But I doubt it. As I said, other men are smart, too, and Vitanza's kids and The Mazzini Club boys believed my story.

I read the newspapers carefully now. I'm waiting for a small item about an old man named Tercio Osso being hit by a truck, or found in the river drowned by accident, or maybe the victim of an unfortunate food poisoning in a restaurant that just happens to be run by a member of The Mazzini Club.

Nothing fancy or complicated this time, just a simple, everyday accident. Of course, everyone will know what really happened, but no one will ever prove it. Whoever gets Tercio Osso won't even have to be particularly careful. A reasonably believable accident will do the trick. After all, we're all human and have a sense of justice, and no one likes to be played for a sucker.

Jon L. Breen

The Vanity Murder Case

Here is another of Jon L. Breen's past-master pastiches for which he has so sure a hand, so sure a 'tec touch. This is the second about S. S. Van Dine's Philo Vance—another "hitherto undiscovered account of one of Philo Vance's greatest triumphs"—a flashing example of Vance's "instant detection." As we said about the first Philo Vance pasticcio, you will find this fascinating reading—no parody pot shots this time, but every tone and accent the right "McWright," the real "McDine" . . .

Detective: "PHILO VANCE"

When Philo Vance first learned of my intention to make public some accounts of his briefer criminal investigations,* he urged me to include among them the murder of Ambrose Furley, a pioneer in the field of subsidy book publishing.

"Y'know, Van, the demise of Furley may have spelled *finis* as it were to Furley and Company, but the 'vanity' publishing houses are still goin' strong, and although most of them at least flirt with legitimacy, there are still a few scoundrels who are as unscrupulous and vicious as the unlamented Furley himself. The case may not have been too spectacular an example of my peculiar talents, but there's a message in it for literary novices everywhere."

Vance is too modest about his own contribution. Actually, his incredibly rapid solution of the Furley mystery—The Vanity Murder Case, as it was called in the press—included a gem of psychological deductive reasoning.

It began one morning with a visit from Bryce Gordon, an old Harvard classmate of Vance and me, who had recently made the

*Beginning with *The Austin Murder Case* (EQMM, December 1967).

best-seller lists with his novel entitled *The Children of Medea*—after years of unsuccessful forays at authorship and a patchwork of assorted jobs including cab-driving, door-to-door brush-selling, stage magic, and cross-country lecturing to Women's Clubs.

"I don't want to gloat, Vance, but I guess I was right and you were wrong," said Gordon.

"About what, old chap?" inquired Vance innocently.

"You told me I'd be throwing my money away if I published my novel through Furley after every commercial publisher turned it down. Have you seen the latest best-seller list in *The Times*?"

"Oh, yes, ol' dear. And my warmest congratulations on your most inspirin' success story. But I haven't changed my opinion of the vanity publishing business. For every case like yours, a thousand poor souls get separated from their money by promises of glory and grandeur. In almost every case, a really worthy work of literature will be published by a reputable publisher—at *their* cost—even if they lose money."

"Not necessarily true, Vance. What about *The Children of Medea* then? You yourself said it deserved an audience."

"And it found one, because the time was right for it. Deucedly dense on the part of the established publisher not to see that; they usually read their trends a bit more accurately. But Furley would have published your book even if it were unalloyed rubbish, provided you came up with the filthy lucre to finance your folly—and no doubt he'd have assured you of your unappreciated literary genius while he was doin' it! No, Gordon, I won't sing a paean for Mr. Furley, blackguard that he is, just because one worthwhile manuscript happened to fall into his grubby hands."

"You'll never admit you're wrong, will you, Vance? Maybe if you *met* my benefactor you'd change your opinion."

"Benefactor? You did all the benefactin', I venture. But 'pon my soul, meetin' the chap might prove a most enlight'nin' experience. You have something in mind?"

"He's having a luncheon for me and a few of his recent authors—"

"—for whom I dare say 'suckers' might be a more exact appellation," Vance drawled.

"I'll ignore that. It's set for André's Restaurant next Friday noon. Why don't you and Van Dine join us? Ambrose says he'll be glad to meet you."

"And we'd be altogether charmed to meet Ambrose Furley. See you then, old boy."

André's Restaurant boasted one of the finest French cuisines in all New York in those days. Its dining-rooms were large and grandly appointed, but its prices were astonishingly reasonable even for those depression times. "Mr. Furley is a good businessman with an eye for a bargain," Vance told me *sotto voce* as we entered.

The Furley party occupied a circular table in a private dining-room on the second floor of André's. There were eight chairs around the table, three of them occupied when Vance and I arrived.

Ambrose Furley was a short, rather plump man, precisely dressed in a well-tailored grey suit, complete with vest and watchchain. His hands appeared flabby and soft, but his handshake—the two-handed kind, often favored by politicians—was surprisingly firm.

"Such a pleasure, Mr. Vance! I've read about so many of your cases." He chuckled. "I sometimes read what the other publishers publish."

"Well, my dear chap, I hope you sometimes read what you publish as well. Not too much of it, though."

Bryce Gordon was also there to greet us, with a beautiful dark-haired girl sitting next to him. "Now, Vance!" he laughed. "Already starting the verbal duel?"

Furley chuckled. "Jest all you wish, Mr. Vance. A publisher with Bryce Gordon on his list can afford to be twitted."

"This is Ann Vernon, Vance," Gordon said. "Mr. Furley is going to bring out her first volume of poetry soon."

"I just hope it enjoys the success of *The Children of Medea*," Miss Vernon cooed, beaming at Gordon.

"You know, my dear," said Furley, "we can't all be bestsellers. But I think a poet of your talent can expect a reasonably good sale. Of course, the audience for poetry, even poetry as fine as yours, is not as large as the audience for novels. It's a pity, but it's a fact of life."

"I'll be happy if I just get my investment back," the girl said. "It's costing me eight hundred dollars for the first edition, Mr. Vance."

"I'm sure you will, my dear," said Furley hastily. "But even if you should not, think of the pride you and your friends and fam-

ily can take in your very own published book!"

A newcomer entered the room, an elderly lady. As the others went forward to greet her, Vance turned to me and whispered, "That young lady with Gordon appears to me entirely too intelligent to be taken in by all this folderol, Van. I think she's up to something with this ingénue act of hers. This is going to be a most inter'stin' gatherin', eh, what?"

"Miss Eloise Christopher, meet Mr. Vance and Mr. Van Dine," Furley said.

The elderly lady's eyes lit up. "Philo Vance! Oh, this is exciting! Wait till I tell the other girls! And, Mr. Van Dine, you write those wonderful books about Mr. Vance, don't you? How much do they cost you?"

Vance murmured, "Mr. Van Dine is too modest to speak, Miss Christopher, but I must tell you that Charles Scribner's Sons pays Mr. Van Dine for the privilege of publishing his books. Mr. Van Dine doesn't pay them a penny."

"Why, Mr. Furley tells me that my book on flower arrangements will cost two thousand dollars to publish. That's all the money I have saved."

"You see, Eloise," Furley said smoothly, "Mr. Van Dine is an established writer—he has had many books published. This is only your first. So we ask you to assume part of the risk. If your first book is successful, then later you may write other books, and the publisher—and I hope I continue to have that honor—will indeed pay you. In fact, if your first book sells—a sufficient number of copies—and the best promotional techniques will be employed by Furley and Company to distribute them—I will be paying you royalties."

"Of course, of course. You explained that to me before, but I'm so forgetful." Miss Christopher shook her head in a troubled manner. "I wish I could decide. It would be so nice to have a book to give my friends, but it's so much money. What do you think I ought to do, Mr. Vance?"

"Well, madam—"

"Eloise," Furley interrupted, "I think Mr. Vance is a bit of a skeptic on the subject of subsidy publishing. I'd think that Bryce Gordon and *The Children of Medea* were argument enough for my cause. But I'd like to remind you that self-publication is almost an American tradition. Some of the greatest names in our grand and glorious American literature either wholly or partially sub-

sidized the publication of their own work. James Fenimore Cooper is an example that springs to mind at once."

"I believe," drawled Vance, "that Cooper was forced into self-publication because of a prejudice in American publishing at that time against native American writers. That condition no longer prevails."

"But other prejudices still do, Mr. Vance. What you say may partially explain the subsidy publications of Cooper and Washington Irving and William Cullen Bryant, but what of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry David Thoreau and, in our own century, Theodore Dreiser and Upton Sinclair?" I reiterate, sir, that subsidy publishing of literary work is an honored American tradition!

"I might add, Mr. Vance, that subsidy publishing has produced important documents in all phases of scholarly and academic study. Including criminology, one of your own fields of interest. Remember the fellow who killed that architect at Madison Square Garden? He published his autobiography through a subsidy publishing firm."**

"All no doubt very true, my dear man," Vance replied. "But aren't the vanity presses—"

"I prefer not to hear that slanderous term, sir!" said Furley, now genuinely angry. "You would accuse Mr. Bryce Gordon, a man with faith in the fruits of his arduous labor, of sordid vanity? You would accuse James Fenimore Cooper—?"

Furley's tirade was interrupted by the entrance of another guest, a short and very slight man with a shiny bald head, horn-rim spectacles, an unkempt moustache, and a diffident manner.

The Professor smiled shyly as he greeted each of us in turn. He drew Slade, one of the most dazzling academic minds in the field of Elizabethan drama. Welcome, sir!"

The Professor smiled shyly as he greeted each of us in turn. He congratulated Gordon on his novel. "A brilliant work indeed, Mr. Gordon. But the title puzzled me a bit—the symbolism of it."

*When Philo Vance read over the initial draft of this account, he pointed out that in the 30-odd years since the events of the Furley case occurred, at least one major American novelist (James Drought) has established a reputation through financing publication of his own works. Vance adds, however, that Drought did this on his own rather than through an established subsidy publisher and that such instances remain rare.

**Furley referred here to Harry K. Thaw, who killed Stanford White at Madison Square Garden. His book, *The Traitor*, was published by Dorrance and Company in 1926, though it was subsequently suppressed by the Thaw family.

"Well, of course, the theme of the book is objectivity," Gordon explained. "And Medea was the only truly *objective* woman in history or literature."

"Is that so?" said the Professor.

"Think about it! Can you name another? She actually *killed her own children* because she thought their blood was tainted. Wasn't that admirable?"

"If objectivity is the most admirable quality in the world, yes," Vance said pensively. "But is it actually? Is it always?"

"I think it is," said Gordon.

"Tell Mr. Vance about your researches, Professor Slade," said Furley. "I know he'd be interested."

"I'm sure I would," Vance agreed.

"Well, I have a theory," the little Professor offered tentatively.

"A theory," Vance echoed encouragingly.

"Yes. About Shakespeare. I've written a book about it, and I'm arranging with Mr. Furley to publish it."

"And what is your theory?"

A slightly fanatical gleam appeared in Professor Slade's eyes. "Shakespeare didn't write the plays, you see."

"No? Who did then? Bacon?"

"Bacon!" the Professor snorted derisively. "What a fantastic notion that is!"

"Christopher Marlowe then?"

"No, no! Ben Jonson!* It seems so obvious when you consider the evidence . . ." And Professor Slade proceeded to elucidate. Once he began, he seemed disinclined, indeed unable, to stop. He seemed thoroughly convinced of the accuracy of his conclusions.

Miss Christopher appeared disappointed. "I'd always rather hoped that Shakespeare was Shakespeare," she said mournfully.

The Professor's monologue was fortuitously interrupted by the appearance of the final guest. He was a young man of medium height and build with black hair and dark eyes. His eyes constantly held that fanatical spark which had appeared in Professor Slade's only when the subject under discussion was his own pet theory.

Ann Vernon seemed very attracted to the newcomer, and a

*Strange as this theory may sound, it is by no means the most bizarre hypothesis to be advanced about the plays' authorship. One scholarly book quite seriously advanced the notion that the greatest Elizabethan playwright was actually Queen Elizabeth herself.

flash of jealousy crossed the face of Bryce Gordon.

"This is Guy Coopersmith," Furley announced. "A very gifted political and economic theorist."

The use of the last word apparently was a *faux pas* on Furley's part. Coopersmith exclaimed, "Activist! You *wish* I were only a theorist, you pitiful little man! Comes the revolution, I'll destroy you!" Then he seemed to get a grip on himself. "Figuratively speaking, of course. When my so-called theories come into practice, all men will live in peace and enjoy the fruits of their labors equally."

"Are you a Socialist?" said a wide-eyed and scandalized Miss Christopher.

"I, madam, am an Acurrentialist. I seek the destruction of all present monetary systems. Only by eliminating the outmoded concept of money can we all work together in harmony."

"Tut! Tut! My dear man," Vance said sorrowfully, "must you therefore destroy everyone's money? Not merely throw your own away to Mr. Furley?"

"Really, Vance!" Furley retorted. "You're becoming downright offensive!"

Bryce Gordon chortled happily, as if he relished the clash. "Sorry I invited this blood-hound, Ambrose?"

Furley controlled his temper with obvious effort. "Of course not. All I have to do, Bryce, is remind myself of *The Children of Medea*, and I know I need not justify myself against sneering charges by Mr. Vance. And I might say to you, Vance, that Coopersmith is hardly throwing his money away. I'm offering him a platform for his ideas. I don't happen to agree with them, but I feel they should be disseminated. And if I wind up burning my money, that's the chance I have to take."

With good humor apparently restored throughout the group, Furley suggested we order lunch. The meal proceeded without incident and everyone seemed to enjoy the food. We sat in this order around the table, starting with Furley and reading clockwise: Furley, Gordon, Miss Vernon, Coopersmith, Miss Christopher, myself, Vance, and Slade. Vance and the Professor continued to discuss the latter's theory animatedly, while Coopersmith and Miss Christopher discussed, rather surprisingly, flower arrangement. Gordon and Miss Vernon exchanged confidences in tones too low for anyone else to hear.

At the conclusion of the meal, after coffee had been served,

poured by Miss Vernon and passed from hand to hand, our host rose to address us. "Ladies and gentlemen, I am happy you were all able to be with me to-day. Indeed, I welcome friends and skeptics alike. I am glad that those of you who were heretofore unacquainted with Mr. Bryce Gordon have enjoyed this opportunity of meeting him. Bryce has vindicated my life's work and brought a new pride and prestige to the whole subsidy publishing industry.

"Not that Furley and Company has not had its past successes—oh, no, indeed. Major Titus Upson's twenty-five volume history of the Great War has brought us countless orders from college and university libraries.* Mary Acheson's books on health foods, the best known of which was *The Joys of Grass*, have given us great occasion for pardonable pride. But the discovery of a novelist, a literary artist, of Bryce Gordon's stature and importance; tends to put all these other achievements in the shade, as it were. You writers who are new to the literary scene—Ann, Eloise, Professor Slade, Mr. Coopersmith—all of you can indeed feel pride in having your volumes brought out by the publisher of Bryce Gordon's distinguished work.

"I have asked Bryce to say a few words to us this afternoon, so without further ado—"

"Mr. Furley, may I please say something first?" Ann Vernon said tentatively and rather shyly.

Furley seemed taken aback, though not alarmed. "Why, yes, Ann, I think so. This is rather unexpected, but I feel it's quite appropriate that a new writer should pay tribute to Mr. Gordon." As the girl rose, Furley resumed his seat:

"Tribute is not precisely what I had in mind, Mr. Furley, though I must say I found *The Children of Medea* admirable." The ingénue pose had suddenly disappeared, and Furley was squirming in his chair, not knowing what was coming but finally sensing in Ann Vernon the formidability that Vance had seen there from the beginning. "I have the impression that the people here today, with the exception of Bryce, have not yet signed contracts for the publication of their books. I know that I, for one, have not as yet paid my eight hundred dollars. Have any of you others paid your tariffs yet? Miss Christopher?"

"Why, no. I've been trying to decide if I could afford—"

"Good. Professor?"

*Subsequent investigation showed that the only university library to interest itself in Major Upson's work was one endowed by the Upson family.

"No, but a check for thirty-five hundred dollars is in my pocket, Miss Vernon. I planned to give it to Mr. Furley to-day."

"Mr. Coopersmith?"

"No, I haven't. What's this all about?"

"I might as well start at the beginning. I'll be brief, though. My name really is Ann Vernon and I am a writer, though hardly a poet. I write feature articles for the New York *Gazette* and my editor suggested I do an article on the subsidy publishing business." She said these last words with a slight irony. "I'll spare Mr. Furley's feelings and not use the offensive term 'vanity press' which is in more common usage.

"It occurred to me that the best way to do this might be to submit a manuscript to one of the subsidy publishers, so I sent in a collection of my poems. The single drawback was that I had never written any poems; so I sat down in the *Gazette* city room and wrote the Complete Poetical Works of Ann Vernon. It took me, I should say, twenty minutes. I wonder if you'd like to hear one of my poems?"

Furley, who had suffered in silence until now, managed to bleat out, "Please, Miss Vernon, *please!*"

Ann Vernon ignored him. "One of my personal favourites goes as follows:

My heart is a weary wanderer,
Floundering in the greenery and frightening the fawns.

I love the flowers
And the trees and their bowers—
I could look at them for hours,
Couldn't you
For minutes a few?

"Isn't that lovely? All my poetry was in the same mindless vein, and to be absolutely sure I hadn't created works of aesthetic beauty by sheer accident, I showed it to the *Gazette* literary critic, who assured me that my poetry was just what it was intended to be: unadulterated rubbish!"

"Now would you like to hear what Mr. Furley said about my poetry? I'll quote: 'All of our readers were enraptured by your poetry. For sweep, gusto, lyricism and poetic feeling it rivals the best verse being written to-day. Furley and Company would be

honoured to bring your work to the eager public that hungers for it . . . I could go on and on. It wasn't until his third letter that Mr. Furley got around to dollars and cents—to be exact, eight hundred of the former.

"The way my incredibly bad manuscript was treated led me to investigate further. I interviewed many so-called authors whose works Furley had put in book form, and I learned that my worst suspicions were true. Mr. Furley has made countless thousands of dollars in the last fifteen years through human gullibility, and I am happy to take this opportunity to demonstrate that fact. My article will appear in print next week,* but I offer you people this advance notice so you won't make the mistake of investing your hard-earned money in the empty promises of this wretched confidence man."

Stunned silence fell over the group as Ann Vernon sat down, trembling with anger and satisfaction. Furley, looking stricken, rose and finally found his voice. "But what then of *The Children-of Medea*?"

"A fluke!" said Ann Vernon. "A publishing accident."

"Yes," said Bryce Gordon. "A fluke." His voice was hard. Furley seemed to realize that he was without an ally in the room, reading the shocked revulsion in the face of Eloise Christopher, the contempt in Guy Coopersmith's visage, the miserable defeat in the little Professor's sad eyes.

So often after hideous crimes have taken place, it seems that a sense of foreboding is recalled by the bystanders, something in the air that should have told them a grim event was about to take place. On this occasion, I confess I had no such feeling. The scene was dramatic enough, but in some ways more comic than tragic. Had I but known of the murderous intent in the heart of one of my luncheon companions, I might have had some inkling of what was about to happen—I might have been able to call up a suitable quotient of foreboding. But I did not, and watched what took place with a sudden shocked horror.

Furley raised his coffee cup, as if seeking solace in the hot liquid. He took one drink, gasped, clutched his throat, and fell dead before our shocked eyes. Someone had put cyanide in the vanity publisher's coffee...

*As it turned out, Ann Vernon's article never appeared in print. However, several years later, the results of a similar experiment, by John A. Fuller, appeared in *Saturday Review* (August 1, 1959; pp. 8-9).

Of all the murders investigated by Philo Vance, the poisoning of Ambrose Furley was solved the fastest. Although the publisher's death at first appeared to be suicide, or, if not that, a most mysterious murder, Vance knew at once who had killed Furley and he was ready to explain it to Sergeant Ernest Heath* as soon as the doughty Sergeant appeared on the scene and before the redoubtable Chief Medical Examiner, Dr. Emanuel Doremus, had even been summoned from his bed.**

Rather regretfully, Vance instructed Heath to arrest the guilty person, who made no attempt to resist or even to claim innocence.

"How did you know, Mr. Vance?" Heath asked.

Vance puffed his Régie and blew several wreaths of smoke toward the ceiling before he replied to the Sergeant's question.

"It's so extr'ordin'rily simple, Sergeant," Vance said, almost listlessly. "I rather hate to tarnish my omniscient aura by explainin' it to you, but I suppose I shall. Yes, quite so.

"Well, to begin with, the murderer had to have prior knowledge of the sort of confidence man Mr. Furley really was. There was no opportunity, y'see, to slip the cyanide into the coffee cup after the lady made her revelations, since all eyes were then on Furley. Before that, the coffee cups had been passed around the table and there was ample time for all sorts of hanky-panky. Also, one doesn't carry cyanide around in one's pocket all day unless one is plannin' to use it, so the murderer must have known beforehand what he was goin' to do.

"Now most of the guests were unknown to each other before today. The murderer, to realize the extent and magnitude of Mr. Furley's villainy, might have gotten that knowledge through access to Miss Vernon's information. If so, he must have known Miss Vernon."

"Or have been Miss Vernon," Heath suggested.

"My word, yes. But Miss Vernon had 'no need, psychologically speakin', y'know, to murder Furley. She was ventin' her spleen through the article. So I asked myself, which of those present knew Ann Vernon before to-day? And I perceived only one answer. Not conclusive, of course, certainly not bindin' in court—"

"That'll be Mr. Markham's jurisdiction," Heath pointed out, re-

*An investigator for the Homicide Bureau, Sergeant Heath had figured in many of Vance's cases.

**Dr. Doremus, convinced his services were only required in the dead of night, had taken to sleeping in the daytime.

ferring to Vance's close friend, the District Attorney of New York County.

"Quite. My choice of murderer seemed correct psychologically. A man who admired Medea for her superhuman objectivity. A man who might well kill someone he considered his benefactor if he learned that person was actually an evil enemy of society who'd victimized many people and doubtless would victimize many more by plantin' in them false hopes of literary success. A man whose personal success inadvertently would aid the swindling of others, and who therefore felt a sense of responsibility, even a sense of guilt.

"And I might add," Vance concluded, "a man who had been a professional magician to whom slippin' a pinch of cyanide into a coffee cup passin' through his hands would be mere child's play. And so, Heath, I regretfully put my finger on my old school chum, Bryce Gordon. And I do this with a heavy but righteous heart."

"Q"

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Michael Gilbert

The Cork in the Bottle

Martin Lucas Field, a young geologist prospecting for oil in South America, has an unusual adventure at his campsite on the river Mora. You will know what we mean by "unusual" when you meet Marciana de Jara and become as involved as Martin in her revolutionary troubles . . .

Major Patino, Chief of Police of the township and Province of Fernando de la Mora, looked like a contented marmoset. He rode an enormous gray horse, and rode it very well, having been, in a manner of speaking, born in the saddle. If he had not, he would have been thrown as the horse reared and bucked in protest at the salvo of fifteen explosions.

Martin Lucas Field came running. He helped to soothe the indignant animal.

"I say," he said, "I do apologize. If I'd seen you coming I'd have postponed the firing."

"It's nothing." Major Patino slid down, handed the reins to one of Martin's mestizo laborers, and looked around him curiously.

"In the town," he said, "it was rumored that you are prospecting for oil. I rode out here expecting to find a huge, an enormous"—he raised one arm up to the sky and grinned—"contraption for drilling. Instead I find you, and three uneducated men, discharging some sort of fireworks."

"It doesn't look very impressive," agreed Martin.

The encampment comprised his own tent on one side of the road, a tent shared by the mestizos on the other, a parked truck, a table standing in the open with apparatus on it, and a tangle of fifteen wires leading out from the table to fifteen black boxes arranged, in groups of five, in a straightish line.

"You must understand that I'm not a driller," said Martin, "I'm a geologist. I try to discover what lies underneath the crust of your abominable countryside."

"And those little black boxes will tell you?"

"They are geophones. They record the explosions. The sound goes down until it strikes a layer of hard rock. Then it bounces back again. By timing it I can tell just how deep that hard layer lies. When I have made enough soundings I can then plot it. If the layer runs horizontally in a straight line"—Martin held out his brown hand stiffly—"no good. If it runs like this, however"—he bent his hand, with the knuckles sticking upward—"and forms what we call a dome, or cap, it is very hopeful. And if it is not only a dome, but a double dome—we call it a hat, for it looks like this—" He drew with his stick in the dust. "It has the appearance of a hat with the brim turned up on both sides—you see?"

Major Patino stared down at the marks in the dust. His good-natured face was puckered.

"If you find that," he said, "you are certain of oil?"

"Not *absolutely* certain. But very nearly so. The last time a structure like that was found it became the Gran' Cosa Field in Venezuela."

"I hope you discover no caps nor hats," said the Major, "for if you do, the drillers will come. Drilling camps mean trouble—and we have enough trouble here already."

"My boys were trying to tell me something about that when we pitched tents here last night. I don't speak their lingo well enough to make out exactly what the trouble was."

The Major went over and spoke to the nearest of the three mestizos. They were Tupi-Guaranis, half Indian, half Spanish, black-haired, brown-skinned, with pale gray, almost yellow eyes. When they learned that the Major understood their language they grabbed his arm and started to chatter and gesticulate.

"What they say," said the Major, tearing himself away at last, "is that they hold this to be an unhappy place."

"Unhappy?"

"It is difficult to render the meaning exactly—all words in Guarani mean more than one thing. They are so poor, you see, they have to economize even with their language. Roughly, it means a place of ill fortune, where bad things can happen."

"Supernatural things?"

"Partly. Not entirely. They say that your camp was watched all last night."

"Watched! By humans, do they mean? I did hear a couple of mountain foxes barking."

"They are not sure if the watchers are of this world or the next. Whichever they are, they wish to leave. They would have run off last night, I think, if it had not been their payday tomorrow."

"I'd no notion things were as bad as that. Couldn't you say something to set their minds at rest?"

"But I might find myself agreeing with them," said the Major. "It may be that their instincts are sound. You have indeed pitched your camp in a very odd spot."

"I'm astride the only road leading down to the river. But I'm not blocking it."

"Not actually blocking it. No. But if people wished to come past—at night, shall we say—they would be certain to disturb you. If you didn't hear them your boys would."

"Probably. But who would want to use the road at night? It leads only to the river bank. And there's no crossing place."

"On the contrary; this is the *only* place in forty miles that the river Mora *can* be crossed. That, of course, is why the road exists. Above, there are a succession of rapids. Below, the Mora runs through crumbling ravines. Here, it sweeps in a circle. The banks on either side are flat. The current is not too strong, and a boat, well handled, can cross."

"All right," said Martin, "Let anyone cross who wishes. I'm not stopping them."

"The people who habitually use this road are rough and secretive folk. Contrabandists."

"And I'm not a Customs Officer," said Martin. "So if you should happen to meet any smugglers, please assure them that the path is open."

"Why should you assume," said the Major stiffly, "that I am on speaking terms with criminals? I am a police officer. I know my duty—"

It took a cup of tea laced with whiskey to mollify the Major. As dusk approached he remounted his great horse and turned to leave. "I will visit you in the morning," he said. "Sleep soundly."

Martin walked out to inspect the results of the afternoon's shot firing. The nests of geophones covered, altogether, nearly half a mile. Ideally, they should all have been placed at the same level, but in that mountainous country such nicety was impossible, and by the time he had collected the final reading sheet Martin found himself quite far from his camp and above it.

Looking down, he saw exactly what the Major had meant. For

people carrying loads, or encumbered with transport, the path formed a bottleneck through which they must pass on their way to the river.

"And I'm the cork in the bottle," he said.

The orange rim of the sun touched the saw-edge of the mountains. The indigo blue sky turned to sick pearl, and then to steel-gray. It was very quiet. Martin shivered, and then said to himself, "Someone must have walked over my grave."

Only, this time, he saw the grave. It had been dug in a small flat space surrounded by boulders and was visible only from where he was standing. The freshly excavated red soil was piled in neat heaps at both ends.

Martin made his way back to camp. He was very angry and a little frightened. Using his limited vocabulary of Guarani words he asked his boys which of them had been wasting time doing this unnecessary digging. The mestizos stared at him, their yellow eyes blank. Either they could not or would not understand him, and in the end Martin gave it up. He spoke the word for supper and strode off to his tent, took off his field boots, put on a pair of slippers, and poured himself out a generous whiskey, filling the glass with water from the bottle hanging beside the tent pole.

This was the time of day he liked best—the day's work done, a peaceful hour before supper, an hour to relax, to sip the first drink of the day, to make plans for tomorrow.

What, he thought with a touch of complacency, would an observer see if he chanced to look through the tent opening into this snug and workmanlike interior? He would see a sunburned, tough, self-reliant person, the only white man in five hundred square miles of wild country, the archetypical Anglo-Saxon-adventurer. No romantic, however. Simply a man, doing a man's work. Ha!

Even better, he thought, if the admiring gaze through the tent flap should happen to come from the eyes of a girl. An attractive girl, naturally. Not necessarily pretty. Prettiness did not go with the rugged backlands inhabited by men like himself. A girl with close-cropped black hair. Black-haired girls had always appealed to him more than colorless blondes. A girl with a warm face, bronzed by the sun and a mouth ready to smile and show small even teeth. Small breasts—well, not *too small* but, emphatically, not too big. And a nicely rounded bottom and long legs.

(A psychologist, could he have read Martin's thought, would

have realized that most of his ideas about girls came from magazines and very few of them from life.)

Footsteps on the path outside heralded the arrival of his supper and brought him back to earth. It would be corned beef stew, fresh potatoes, and tinned vegetables.

The flap of the tent opened, and a girl came in.

She had a brown face, black hair, and her mouth, half open in an apologetic smile, showed small even teeth.

For a long moment Martin stared at her, saying nothing. Then he scrambled to his feet.

"I'm sorry," he said. "That was very rude of me—"

"It was rude of *me*," said the girl. She spoke the unaccented English of an educated South American. "I should not have come here unannounced. Had the matter not been urgent I should not have done so."

"How *did* you get here?" said Martin. It was the first thing that came into his head. He was still struggling between fantasy and reality.

"On horseback, of course." The girl's half smile broadened. "Did you think I flew down from the sky?"

"To tell you the truth, I didn't know what to think. Won't you sit down please. I heard no horse."

"I left him at the head of the path. There is no grazing here. Thank you."

She took the camp chair he was offering her, and as she lowered herself into it the light coat she was wearing swung open and Martin glimpsed her body.

His first impression was more of strength than of beauty. It was not that she was obtrusively muscled. She looked, he thought, like a big athletic boy whose arms and legs have not yet hardened into manhood but show all the signs of strength to come.

He was aware of a feeling of breathlessness as he walked with deliberate slowness to his own chair and sat down.

"Your business must indeed be urgent," he said, conscious that he sounded stilted, "for you to ride out to a desolate spot like this at this time of night."

(He could see her on a horse, controlling it superbly.)

"It is a matter of life and death." She said it without any hint of dramatic emphasis—as though life and death were kindred spirits, with both of whom she had more than a nodding acquaintance.

"First, I should introduce myself, with a little more formality, I think. I am Marciana de Jara. My father is Doctor Ignacio de Jara. You will have heard of him."

For a moment the name escaped him. Then he remembered. Two journalists talking in a bar down in the capital city.

"He is a politician, isn't he?"

"He was a politician. He was one of the founders of the Partido Democrata Cristiano. For two years now he has been a prisoner at the National Penitentiary at Tacumbu. His crime was to be too successful."

"The General does not welcome competition?"

"Only when it is too weak to succeed. But he will not tolerate an opposition which opposes. At the last so-called free election it was arranged that his own party would win eighty seats, the Liberals fifteen, and the Christian Democrats twelve. In fact, so popular had my father become personally that his party won thirty-three seats."

"How very embarrassing for the General," said Martin. He was not really interested in politics, but he wanted to keep Marciana talking so that he could go on looking at her. "What did he do?"

"A recount was demanded in eighteen cases, and curiously enough, sufficient spoiled voting papers were found to reverse the result. Then a month later came the plot."

"Plot?"

"It had nothing to do with my father. I think it was devised entirely by the Security Police. They got hold of two or three tame plotters who were very leniently treated when they confessed."

"Confessed what?" asked Martin, genuinely puzzled.

"Confessed that the true leader of the plot was my father, of course. He was at once arrested and held without trial, under the Law de Defensa de la Democracia. He has been in prison ever since. They have not treated him well."

Martin, who knew something of South American prisons, said nothing.

"For nearly two months they kept him in the stocks, the whole time, with his legs stretched out in front of him. When they let him out he had lost the use of his legs. He could only drag himself along on the ground, using his elbows. When he had recovered a little they put him back in the stocks. This time they beat him, on the soles of the feet. They beat him so hard that many of the bones in his feet were broken."

"Don't talk about it, please, if it troubles you," said Martin.

But there was no weakness in her face—only calm strength and certainty of purpose.

"I am telling you about it," she said, "so that you will understand. A week ago they were moving my father from Tacumbu to a prison in the north. It was because Tacumbu was being visited by an American Civil Rights Committee, I think. We were informed of the move twenty-four hours before it took place. We have good friends."

Certainly she would have good friends.

"We intercepted the car that was taking my father to his new prison. It was not"—she hesitated for a moment over the idiom—"it was not an affair of kid gloves, you understand. Two of our men were wounded, one of them badly. Two of the police were killed. The driver was wounded and disarmed. But we succeeded in what we had set ourselves to do. My father was brought to a farm, some miles from here, by night. He has been hidden there for the past two days. Arrangements had to be made—"

"With the contrabandists?"

"Yes, with the contrabandists. You know of them?" Her eyes were like steel blades.

"Major Patino was speaking of them."

"Ah, the fat little local Chief of Police. All the same, he is not such a fool as he looks. What did he say?"

"He said that I was blocking one of their only through routes."

"And what did you say?"

"I told him that I wasn't a Customs Officer."

The girl laughed. "It was a good answer. All the same, things will not be easy for us. My father cannot walk. He will have to be carried, in a sort of litter, down to the river. It will take four men to do it. There he will be placed in a boat and ferried across. Once in Argentina he will be safe. His friends have transport waiting for him."

"It sounds to me like a piece of cake."

When she looked puzzled he said, "It's a stupid expression we have in England. It means that it should be easy. And if you were afraid that I should try to stop you, then think again. Now that I understand what you are doing, please believe me when I say that you can count on all possible help."

"You are kind, Mr. Field. You see, I found out your name."

"Then you found it out wrong. To my friends, it's Martin."

"Thank you, Martin. But you must not help me. You must not become involved in this affair, not in any way. I forbid it." The smile which accompanied these words robbed them of their sting.

She said, "I think you do not quite realize the dangers of what we are doing. You spoke of a piece of cake. We have in this country a cake which is served on the first day of the year. It is soft and white and delicious." Her little white teeth gleamed. "But in one of the slices there is buried a small hard charm. It is meant to be lucky, but if you are careless you can break your teeth on it."

"I see," said Martin slowly. "And who is going to break our teeth in this case?"

"His name is Colonel Cristobal Ocampos. He is head of the Security Police, and he is a devil."

"Even if he has diabolic powers can he guard all the frontiers in this country?"

"He does not have to. He knows that my father will try to get to Argentina. There are not more than a dozen crossing places for a man who *can* walk. For a man who has to be carried this is the inevitable choice. Also, the car which brought my father here was stopped on its way back, and the driver was questioned. His answers were not entirely satisfactory to Colonel Cristobal Ocampos, and he is still being held. No doubt they will torture him. I do not think he will speak quickly, because he is a brave man. But there are things they can do to him—"

"Yes," said Martin uncomfortably, "I suppose even the bravest man—"

She was not listening to him, but to something outside the tent. Martin's words died away into silence.

Her hearing must have been better than his. It was almost a minute before he picked it up—the shuffling of feet, the tiny clink of iron-tipped boots on stone.

One of his mestizo laborers cried out in a harsh, high voice.

"Damned fool," said Martin. "He'll wake everyone for miles."

"Don't go out," said the girl urgently.

"Don't worry about me," said Martin as he flung up the flap of the tent and received a shock. He had been expecting darkness, but it was almost as light as day. While they had been talking, a full moon had swung over the tops of the mountains and was spreading its limelight over the scene.

Up the road, from the direction of the river, came a covered lit-

ter, or palanquin. From the careless way the men were carrying it, it was clearly empty.

His three mestizos were huddled in the entrance of their tent. Martin strode across to them.

"Quiet," he said. "All is well, friends."

Three of the four carriers were squat and dark, men of the mountains, with black shaggy hair, thick lips, and dark faces. The fourth was a curious contrast. He was taller by a head than the others, and much thinner, with a head of hair so light-colored that it looked almost silvery in the moonlight. But it was not only these physical differences which caught and held Martin's attention. It was the face, severe, composed, ascetic—a face which took Martin's mind back to the first colonizers, the Jesuit Fathers who had come with the Spanish conquerors.

He was aware that Marciana was standing beside him. He turned and noted the serious look on her face.

She said, "We shall be back in a few hours. No doubt you will hear us. Might I beg of you not to come out?"

"Why?"

"I have told you. You are a stranger to this country. You must not become involved in our affairs."

"I'm involved already," said Martin, "and I should not be afraid to become more so."

"You would not be afraid, no," said the girl. She said it almost sadly. "But I forbid it. And I have the right to forbid it."

The carriers had gone past now, and had reached a bend in the road. In a moment they would be out of sight.

"Very well," said Martin. "But if by any chance you should need it, my offer of help holds good."

The girl held out her hand, in the English fashion, for him to shake. Martin raised the warm brown hand to his lips and kissed the back of it. The girl turned and walked off up the path. Martin stood, his mouth dry, his heart beating double time. Would she turn around?

As she reached the bend in the road she seemed to hesitate. Please turn, said Martin to himself. Please turn, once more.

The next moment she was gone. Martin swung on his heel and went back into his tent.

When the mestizo cook brought his dinner, Martin looked at him without seeing him; ate the food without being conscious of what it was, sat back in his chair, put his after-dinner cigarillo

into his mouth and forgot, for fifteen minutes, to light it.

One thing was clear. He had no hope of sleep that night. He looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock. His eye fell on the neat pile of seismographic records—sixty of them, the results of four successive firings. He would have to tabulate them some time, and draw the graph which would demonstrate the shape of the hidden strata. It was a finicking piece of drudgery which he usually left to the draftsmen at the base office, but this time he thought he would occupy his mind to the exclusion of thoughts that were far more disturbing.

Two hours later, his head swimming, his eyes bleared with the strain of working in a poor light, he was staring down at the result.

The stratum sloping gently downward had apparently cracked, turning up for a short way, then down again, then up in a perfectly shaped dome, or cap rock. The far side lay beyond his survey, but the general shape was beautifully clear. It would have to be surveyed again, across several different axes, but Martin had no doubt at all that he was looking at the most promising drilling prospect that he had seen in twenty years of search.

It was at this moment that he heard the men coming back. He jumped up, switched off the single electric bulb, and stole across in the darkness to the opening of his tent.

The moon had swung over, and was throwing long shadows among the rocks, and out of a pool of shadow came the palanquin, more slowly now as the carriers took the strains of its loaded weight. There were still four of them. Three were the dark mountaineers, but the fourth was now no longer the tall thin light-haired man. It was Marciana.

Martin held his breath. He said, "If this is the last time I see her it is the most perfect. Young, strong, brave, in the moonlight. A daughter helping to carry her father out of hell and into heaven."

The next moment they had turned with the road and were gone. He could still hear the soft chink of metal on stone, frequently at first, then less often, as they went farther away, and then not at all. Only the far-off sound of a night bird, the whisper of bats' wings, and the silent stars.

One of the few Guarani words that Martin knew was *pyghare*, which meant night. It also meant infinity. As he stood there, straining his ears for a whisper from the river in the valley

below, Martin understood this. Day was finite, but night was infinite.

The first shot sounded like a desecration, as if someone had screamed in Church. A ragged volley followed. Without thinking what he was doing, Martin started to run.

It was a miracle that he did not break a leg. Half a dozen times he stumbled in his headlong descent, saving himself at the last moment. There were men not far ahead of him, shouting; and there was a light, stronger than the moon, a blue-white blaze of incandescence that could only be a searchlight.

As he reached the last corner Martin halted.

The light was focused on the bank and on the slow, brown stream of the Mora. The palanquin lay on its side, half in, half out of the water. A few yards out from the bank an upturned boat swung round in a slow eddy. There was no sign of the carriers.

A line of lights was moving away from the bank, downstream, a steady, purposeful advance. The men who held the lights were sweeping the ground like hunters who are confident they have their quarry cornered.

A flurry of motion. A figure sprang up from the rocks near the river bank and started to run, uphill, toward him. Martin saw two things in consecutive heartbeats. The first was that it was the girl who was being hunted. The second, that there was a man with a rifle crouched behind a rock not five yards below him.

Martin heard the bolt of the rifle click as he jumped. Then he was kneeling on top of the rifleman.

The man had time to give one choked scream. Martin had him by the hair and had banged his head once on the rock when something hit him on the back of the skull—then everything was blotted out in a whirl of fire and blazing pain and darkness . . .

When consciousness returned it was not a sudden process but a succession of slow advances and lapses, like the waves breaking on the sand, each one crawling a little higher, lasting a little longer, before it sank back into the dark sea. And each sense as it returned built up a total of awareness and memory and pain.

His first retained impression was the smell of a cigar. Curious to see who could be smoking, he turned his head and opened his eyes. A stabbing pain forced him to close them again.

Minutes, hours, years later he heard a voice speaking in Spanish. A hand grasped his chin and jerked his mouth open, something hard was thrust in, and a burning jet of raw spirit ran

down his throat. The next minute he was being sick, rolling on the ground, vomiting his heart up.

The voice said something else. Hands picked him up again and propped him in a chair.

He opened his eyes and with a conscious effort held them open. He was in his own tent, but there were things about it that were wrong. It seemed that no fewer than four lights now hung from the ridge pole. It was difficult to count them properly because of the curtain of gray smoke which hung between him and them.

Slowly the smoke cleared, and as it did so, the four lights swung together into two, and the two into one. As eyes and mind focused, movement came back. His head was throbbing, an intolerable pulse which kept time with his heart. But he could see and hear now. And understand. And remember.

The man who had spoken, and whose obese body occupied the other flimsy camp chair to the point of protest and disintegration, was a middle-aged Spanish dandy. The black hair was oiled and curled with a nicety which suggested a wig. The nails of the pudgy hand which held the cigar were manicured and tinted, and the creature had sprinkled on itself a scent so assertive that it almost vanquished the smell of the cigar.

He said, "You must allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ocampos of the Security Police. I would offer you one of my cigars, Mr. Field, but it appears to me that your stomach"—the Colonel lowered his heavy lids for a moment toward the soiled floor—"is in too delicate a condition to appreciate it."

"What's happened?" said Martin. His voice came out in a dry croak.

"You were stupid enough, although I acquit you of any great malice in the heat of the moment—nevertheless, it was a stupidity—to attack one of my men. Fortunately Sergeant Rovera has a hard head, otherwise you might have found yourself in a very difficult situation indeed. As it was, you got a crack on the head yourself, which might be described as poetic justice."

There was a question which Martin wanted to ask but which he dared not ask, for fear of the answer. The Colonel took a pull at his cigar, held the smoke for a moment in his pursed cheeks, and then exhaled it. He knew, too, what Martin ached to know, and he had no intention of helping him.

"What," said Martin, controlling his voice with an effort, "what happened to the men?"

"They took to the river. These Argentinos swim like fish. One was almost certainly killed. His body was observed to go under. Two reached the other bank. One, I think, was wounded."

"And the old man?"

"The old man," said Colonel Ocampos thoughtfully.

"Dr. Ignacio de Jara."

The Colonel appeared to hesitate. Then he said, "Ah, yes," as if something previously obscure had suddenly become comprehensible to him. "Dr. Ignacio is—unharmed."

"Unharmed," said Martin. "Crippled by your torturers!" Fear and uncertainty were working on him.

The Colonel said, "Crippled. I see. By the brutality of his jailers, or of the police, I suppose?"

A tiny smile appeared for a fleeting moment at the corners of his mouth—appeared and was gone.

Then there was the question that had to be asked. "And the girl?" Martin said.

"The girl, I fear, is dead."

Martin fought against understanding. It was not true! It could not be true! The man was a sadist. He had said it deliberately. He had said it to get pleasure out of Martin's pain.

"She was killed," said the Colonel, "by a burst from a machine pistol, at medium range. Two, at least, of the bullets hit her in the head. Others—in the body."

Martin stared at him. His mouth was thick with bile.

"I see that I do not entirely convince you. Unfortunately the plainest method of proof is no longer open to me."

"What do you mean?" Martin whispered.

"I cannot ask you to inspect the body for yourself. It has already been buried."

"Buried?"

"My men found an open grave. Normally I should have had to take the body back with me to headquarters, but as I had business here first, it would not have been convenient."

"Business?" said Martin. "More torturing, more killing?"

The Colonel looked at him calmly. "Much can be forgiven," he said, "to a man who has had a knock on the head." He pulled again at his cigar, which was now drawing nicely. "No. Not killing. Just watching. There is a very dangerous man who must be prevented from crossing. His name, which is Rafael Asilvera, would mean nothing to you. No?"

Martin shook his head.

"In case you should encounter him you will please inform the police at once. You will recognize him easily. He is very tall, very thin, and has remarkably light hair, almost white."

"Oh, him," said Martin. "He went up with the empty litter earlier this evening."

At one moment Colonel Ocampos was lying back in his chair. The next, with a spasm of energy incredible in one so fat, he was on his feet, standing over Martin.

"What!" he shouted. "Here already? When? Where? Why was I not told?" His face, a few inches from Martin, was engorged with anger. He raised a fat hand, heavy with rings, and smacked Martin on the side of the face.

Martin tried to get up, but the effort started an engine in his head, accelerating, racing at dizzying speed. As the mist thickened and blackness folded over him he heard the Colonel shouting for his sergeant...

When he woke up he was in his own camp bed, with a bandage round his head. The pain had retreated into a dull ache at the back of his skull, and his cheek still burned where the Colonel's ring had cut it. But he was himself again. He swung his legs off the bed, got cautiously to his feet, and tottered across to the tent opening.

The mestizos were boiling water over a fire of thorn, and grinned cheerfully at him when they saw him. They seemed to have recovered from their apprehensions of the night before. Martin said the word for coffee, then moved back to sit down at his table. The geophone sheets were still there, and the calculations and the graphs he had drawn the night before.

One night before? A lifetime before.

He folded them up and crammed them into the pocket of his jacket, where they made a solid bulge.

After breakfast he walked, very slowly, up the hill to where he had found the grave. It was a supreme effort and he had to sit down twice on the way.

When he got there he sat down on a rock, in the shade.

The grave had been filled. Someone had even spared the time to place a cross at the head of it, two flat pieces of wood which looked as if they had come from a packing case, lashed together with cord. On the crosspiece, in pencil, in Spanish characters was written *Marciana de Jara*, followed by the date.

Martin sat there for a long time. It was the sun moving over the edge of the rock and beating down on his head which finally forced him to move.

First, he took the slab of papers out of his jacket pocket and tore them, slowly, into small pieces. He was tearing up £100,000,000. Maybe £1,000,000,000. Maybe even more. But it was money which would go to the country which had murdered the girl, money which would go to the country of Colonel Ocampos.

Martin grinned crookedly to himself as he got out his lighter, set fire to the tattered pile of paper scraps, and sat back on his heels to watch them burn.

When they were a pile of gray and black ashes he scooped a hole in the loose earth on top of the grave, buried the ashes in it, and covered them again with the earth.

"Money for your journey," he said to Marciana.

The massacre in the Plaza Talavera was not reported in the papers as a massacre, but as an untoward incident.

It occurred when the General was opening the new Farmers Cooperative Building. The car, flying the pennant of State, drew to a halt. The band struck up the National Anthem, the Guard of Honor presented arms, and a figure in General's uniform stepped from the car.

Two shots were fired from a first-story window on the other side of the square, and both hit their target. As the figure in General's uniform swung round and crumpled, someone shouted, "There! There he is! He is running!"

Certainly a man was running. Several men were running. Women and children, too. The machine pistols of the guards opened up.

The casualties were four men, one woman, and two children killed. Another four men, two women, and one child were seriously injured. Forty people sustained less serious injuries. None of this affected the assassin. It was plainclothes policemen stationed at the rear of the building who caught him emerging and cut him to pieces with their carbines.

It later developed that the original victim, whose killing had triggered off the massacre, was not the General at all, but one of his aides. The General, who had been traveling in the second car, without a pennant, was unhurt, and later completed the opening ceremony.

On the morning after the shooting Martin was summoned to the Seguridad Building in the Avenue Diaz. He went to that place of evil reputation with a fairly easy conscience. It was six months since the episode on the river Mora, and since then he had led a quiet life, working mostly in the Company office.

He gave his name to the sergeant on duty in the reception hall and after some telephoning he was conducted along dim corridors and down uncarpeted steps.

"What happens down here?" he asked. His guide seemed not to understand him.

They stopped at last outside a heavy door with no handle but with a small window of glass set in the center. His guide peered through it for a moment, then he put his shoulder to it and it swung heavily open.

He motioned to Martin to enter.

The room was a large one, lit by unwinking fluorescent light. On six slabs lay six bodies, all naked, and all with signs on them of the violence that had killed them.

Colonel Cristobal Ocampos was standing in the middle of the room. He looked up as Martin came in.

"Over here, Mr. Field."

The body lying on the slab was long and thin. The parts which had not been smashed by the bullets looked sunburned and healthy. The hair was light, almost white. The face, which was unmarked, was still serene.

"Do you recognize him?"

"Yes." Martin knew that he was going to be sick. It was not the sights. It was the smell—warm, sweet, fetid, heavy with corruption.

"You're sure you recognize him?"

"Certain. Can I go, please?"

The Colonel said, "You shall come with me to my office."

By the time they got there Martin had recovered a little. He said, "Were those others the people who were killed in the Plaza yesterday?"

"Some of them," said the Colonel. He had got a cigar out and was waving a lighted match carefully under the end of it.

"And the long thin man?"

"He was the assassin. Yes. The man who tried to shoot the General and succeeded only in killing poor Major Villansanti. You did recognize him?"

"I saw him only once, and only for a few seconds, by moonlight, six months ago. But I could not be mistaken. It is a remarkable face. You told me his name but I have forgotten it."

"Rafael Asilvera." Colonel Ocampos intoned the name slowly. It sounded like a private prayer. "He was a most remarkable man. A professional assassin. A perfect shot with any weapon. He could also use a knife and he could kill with his hands. He was the man who shot President Perez at the iron mines, up at Tequila, and escaped. He placed the bomb which destroyed Pedro Gimenez in Brazilia two years ago. He cut the throat of Dr. Alvarenga, the man they called the 'physician of death.' He cut it with the doctor's own lancet, in his own surgery, and left the house undetected. He was the man who wounded, and nearly killed, our General's predecessor."

"And he came here, into this country, with the object of killing the General?"

"That was his next commission. Six months he lay here in hiding. I told you he was a professional. But we have learned to be professionals, too, Mr. Field. From the moment we knew that he had escaped our net and was inside the country, the General was placed under a special routine. No announcements were made of his public engagements. If he attended a banquet, every guest and every waiter was screened. The platform from which he normally spoke to the Assembly was moved, so that no window commanded it. When he traveled abroad, one of his aides traveled in the official car. He himself traveled in the second or third car. It was a game of cat and mouse. In the end we allowed the news to leak out to Asilvera's employers that the General would be opening the Cooperative Building. We guessed that Asilvera would use a rifle. It is his favorite weapon. We had our men *behind* every building in the Square."

"And eight people died?"

"Agreed," said the Colonel. "And if you had told me ten minutes earlier, on that occasion six months ago, that you had seen Asilvera, we should have caught him then and no one would have died—except Asilvera."

"So the whole thing's my fault?"

"We must be fair," said the Colonel. "You were under strain." He looked approvingly at the end of his cigar. "I have often wondered if you had the least idea of what was going on that night. Have you ever considered who dug that grave, and for whom?"

"No."

"Then I will tell you. It was dug by the contrabandists, under the orders of the lady who now lies buried in it. And it was dug, Mr. Field, for you."

Martin stared at him.

The Colonel said, "You were an unforeseen, last-minute obstruction to a very carefully worked-out plan. Let me explain. Our frontiers are, for the most part, easy to watch, particularly for such a remarkable, unforgettable man as Rafael Asilvera. The operation of smuggling him in needed meticulous planning and timing. It was arranged with the contrabandists. They knew the risks. They stipulated payment in minted silver dollars, with six crates of the best scotch whiskey thrown in for good measure.

"Their part was to ferry Asilvera across the Mora and conduct him to a car waiting on the hill road. The empty palanquin they brought with them was to carry their reward back in. At the last moment, when all was ready, what happens? A suspicious-looking foreigner places his tents across the very path they are going to use. Well, they are simple men. They thought of a simple remedy. Cut his throat and bury him. His mestizos will run away, too terrified to speak. Your equipment would have been rolled down into the river. No one had seen you arrive. So no one would raise an alarm if you disappeared. Or not until it was much too late for the mystery to be solved. It was a very practical solution."

"Why didn't they do it?"

"Ah, that was Major Patino. He is a clever little man. He had got wind that something was afoot. He rode over quite openly, to your camp. His actions announced to all concerned that he knew you were there. That saved your life. So another scheme had to be thought of. If you could not be killed, you might be bought."

"Bought?"

"Not all purchases, Mr. Field, are made with money. Some are made by the employment of imagination. By the use of the magic that lies behind a woman's eyes."

"Do you mean to tell me that her story—the whole thing—was made up?"

"Since I was not privileged to be there, I do not know precisely what story she told you. But certain things you said suggested parts of it. Doctor Ignacio de Jara, for instance, is not her father, and was in moderately good health when I spoke to him last. Nor has any attempt been made to rescue him."

Martin was still thinking about the girl. He said, "Who was she?"

"Her name was Marciana Santacruz. She was of the revolutionary party, and high in its councils. If, as I imagine, she painted you a moving picture of the sufferings of the aged Doctor Ignacio in prison, she would be well equipped to do so. She has been in prison three times herself—on the first occasion at the age of fifteen."

"If this is true," said Martin slowly, "if everything you are telling me is fact, and every word she spoke was a lie, you still had no right to shoot her. Asilvera was already in the country. It was too late to stop that."

"But we did not know it. We imagined that what was going down to the river was a reception committee."

"But to shoot! Without stopping to question. In cold blood. It was—" Martin stumbled for words. In the end he said lamely, "It was completely unjustified."

"Since you have pronounced it unjustified," said the Colonel, "I will not attempt to justify it. I will say only this. The General has ruled us now for nearly twenty years. His rule does not appeal to everyone. But it is a great deal better than anarchy. While he rules it is my job to keep him alive. In a country like England, where you have had political stability for hundreds of years, you may tend to undervalue it. You had your Civil War. A gentlemanly affair of Roundheads and Cavaliers. I have read of it. But have you heard of the War of the Triple Alliance, which ravaged this country not so long ago? I thought not. It is not included in your history books.

"Let me tell you a single fact. At the start of the war the population of our country was more than half a million. At the finish it was less than a quarter of a million. And of those left alive, only twenty-eight thousand were men. That is what anarchy and civil war mean in a country like this. That is why many people are in prison today who would not have been imprisoned in your country, and why people have been killed who might still be alive. And if the same situation arose again tomorrow, I would act in the same way."

The Colonel knocked the ash off his cigar and added, "That is enough of lecturing. Goodbye, Mr. Field."

It was not until a long time afterward that it dawned on Martin Lucas Field that he had met a remarkable man.

Berkely Mather

Terror Ride

Reg Carter, owner of a small, poor-paying farm, isolated and on the edge of a lonely moor, had nothing but contempt for his wife, Ella. He considered her sniveling, spineless, helpless, and of no use whatever to a harassed, struggling farmer. But Reg Carter had obviously never heard of the old saying—never underestimate and so on . . .

Reg Carter said, "Seventy acres. Too much for one man to work, not enough for two. Six inches of topsoil and it slopes the wrong way. Eight miles from the nearest village and perched on the edge of the moor. I'm going to sell the damned place."

"Yes, dear," said Ella dutifully.

"Sure, you'd like that, wouldn't you," snarled Reg. "Well, I'm not going to sell—see?"

"No, dear," said Ella.

"Can't you say anything but bloody 'yes, dear' and 'no, dear'?" demanded Reg; but she'd fallen into that trap before so now she said nothing. She just refilled his cup of tea from the brownstone pot and moved the marmalade a tentative inch closer to him, and brushed an incipient tear from the corner of her eye with the back of her hand.

He gulped down the tea, scalded his mouth, cursed, and jumped to his feet. At the kitchen door he turned and scowled at her, and said in tones of deepest contempt, "That's right, snivel! No guts—that's your trouble."

She sat, shoulders drooped and hands folded limply in her lap, sniffing miserably until she heard the truck being coaxed into reluctant life in the shed across the farmyard, sputtering jerkily because of the trouble the starter always gave and which he was constantly swearing he was going to fix once and for all with a sledgehammer. She got up and went out into the soft but steady rain. He backed the truck out of the shed, swung around, and headed for the road, gunning the motor impatiently. She pattered

through the mud and opened the gate.

"When will you be back, dear?" she asked timidly.

"How the hell do I know?" he shouted above the roar of the engine. "Six o'clock, seven o'clock or maybe eight. What difference does it make? It's market day—or had you forgotten that, too?" He drove through, stopped, and added, "And shut the gate this time or you'll have the sheep in the bloody vegetables again."

She went back into the kitchen and took a cigarette from the pack she kept hidden behind the flour bin. He didn't like to see her smoke. It wasn't "farmer's-wifely," he said. She shivered and stood looking down at the glowing stove. Three years of it, she reflected. How much more could she take? She'd have left him long ago had it not been for Louise. Or would she?

He still had his good moments, when things were going reasonably well with the small, ill-paying farm—moments which if not exactly tender were at least amiable. She remembered their earlier days here, when he had given up his job in the land surveyor's office and put his savings and a small legacy from his mother into the farm. The work had been desperately hard but their hopes had been high and they had been happy. But now these recurring moods of his—

The waking whimpering of the baby in the bedroom above brought her back to the present. She dragged out the bathtub and spread towels on the rug in front of the stove, then poured hot water from the blackened iron kettle, added cold and tested it carefully with her bared elbow. She went up the narrow stairs and lifted the baby from her cradle, crooning over her and burying her face in the soft warmth of her woolly night clothes. The whimpering stopped and the baby crowed contentedly.

Ella undressed her and lowered her gently into the water, and then there was a knock at the door. She looked round, surprised. The mailman was not due for an hour yet.

"Come in," she called. "It's not locked."

The door opened and two men entered, carefully closing it behind them. The one in the lead was short and tubby, with a round cherubic face and graying hair plastered flat with the rain. The other was tall and angular, younger, but with a deeply lined face and mean little eyes that didn't seem to focus properly. The older man was dressed in the mudstained ruins of what had once been a smart city suit; the other, more serviceably in jeans and a leather coat. The older man beamed at her delightedly.

"My dear!" he gushed. "What a picture of maternal beatitude. Would that I had the brush of a Rembrandt or a Botticelli." His voice was rich and plummy.

"I'm sorry," said Ella, confused. "My husband has just gone—"

"To market—like the little piggy in the nursery rhyme, while t'other one stayed at home," supplied the man. "So we heard from our hiding place behind the shed." He sniffed ecstatically, his nostrils flaring. "Bacon? Do I smell bacon? Of your gentle charity, dear lady, just a dozen rashers, crisp but not frizzled, with four gloriously fresh farm eggs on top—each."

He yelped as the other man pushed past him and grabbed a piece of toast from the table. "Mind my wrist, you clumsy clod!" he swore, and Ella saw for the first time the handcuffs that linked the older man's right wrist to the other's left. "Forgive my language, my dear," he went on. "This fellow is a trial. An average prison population of thirty-seven thousand, so the statistics say, and unkind Fate has to pair me with this moron."

Ella had risen from her knees beside the bathtub and had wrapped the baby in a towel. Her eyes slid sideways toward the door. The older man smiled gently, chidingly, at her and waggled a finger of his free left hand.

"Ah, no, my dear," he admonished. "It would be highly inadvisable to take the little darling from a warm bath out into the cold rain. Give her to me." He held out his left arm. Ella backed away quickly, her eyes widening. The thin man lurched forward and gripped her by the arm, hard. Ella bit back a moan and clutched the baby tighter.

"Do as you're told, stupid," he snarled. "Unless you want to get hurt."

"Please—please—" whispered Ella. "Let me put her back in her cradle upstairs. I'll get you anything you want then—food—"

"Of course you will," cooed the older man. "Could a mother's heart be anything but compassionate? But I'll take little ducksie-wucksie." He eased the baby away from her. "And now get on with the breakfast. I have the patience of a saint, but I fear for my friend."

He lowered his voice confidentially. "His fourth conviction for grievous bodily harm, you know. He's in—was in—for fourteen years." He smiled gently and backed away to a rocking chair by the stove, drawing the thin man with him. The baby started to wriggle, and then to wail. He made soothing noises and pulled the

other man's arm toward him as he wrapped the towel more comfortably about her.

Ella stood looking at them in an agony of indecision. The thin man snarled again like a vicious animal and raised his free right arm threateningly. Ella hurriedly got bacon and a bowl of eggs from a shelf by the window, poked up the fire, and put on a big frying pan. The baby's wailing had ceased for the moment and she lay in the crook of the older man's arm, looking up at him with wide eyes.

"That's better," he said with deep satisfaction. "Dogs and children—they take to Uncle Robert like magic." He looked up at the clock on the mantelpiece. "The news," he said. "Make a long arm for the radio, Grotters."

The other man reached out to the old-fashioned set on a side table and switched on the radio. A burst of pop music filled the room. "Not that, you idiot," said his companion.

The other made adjustments of the dial and an announcer's voice came up: "—as the motor coach conveying them from the Ilchester Assizes skidded off the road and overturned. The thirty convicts, who were being taken to the County Gaol after sentence, were linked in pairs by handcuffs. Six pairs made a break, but five have been recaptured. The remaining pair is still at large. They are Robert Finsome, sentenced to five years for false pretenses, and Thomas Grottersley, sentenced to fourteen years for robbery with violence and grievous bodily harm. The public are particularly warned of the latter. He is described as being a man of enormous physical strength but of very low mentality and—"

The thin man swore filthily and switched off.

"Oh, come now," chuckled the other. "You mustn't be oversensitive, Grotters. We can't *all* be members of the criminal intelligentsia. Anyhow, that enormous physical strength of yours is going to be useful in removing this wretched jewelry from our lily-white wrists."

"Shut your damn mouth," Grottersley said savagely, and added to Ella, "Get a move on with that grub, you."

Half an hour later, fed and replete, they sat in front of the fire on adjoining chairs, the baby in a carry-cot beside them, while Ella prepared the baby's food in a saucepan.

Finsome said, "And now, my dear, let us discuss tactics. Who normally calls here during the day?"

"Only the postman," she answered dully. "He's due about now." She glanced over her shoulder at the window through which could be seen a stretch of the lonely moorland road, running arrow-straight for half a mile until it disappeared into a dip between the low surrounding hills. Finsome stood up and peered out through the driving rain.

"Admirably sited," he said approvingly. "It couldn't be better. And how does the postman actually deliver your mail?"

"He drives the post-office truck," she answered. "He usually comes in here for a cup of tea."

Grottersley leered meaningfully at her, and Finsome regarded him with disapproval.

"Really, Grotters," he said severely. "That's most uncalled for." He turned to Ella. "At the same time, my dear, that's the way this cynical old world is inclined to jump to conclusions. Especially in regard to such a young and pretty woman as yourself—and in such a lonely place."

"My husband is always here," she said, flushing. "Well, most days."

"But not *this* day," said Finsome. "You must discourage the postman, kindly but firmly, and in a manner not likely to arouse his suspicions. Do you understand?"

"She'd better understand, unless she wants a belt on the ear," growled Grottersley. "Make him shove the letters under the door, and tell him to buzz off. Tell him your old man's suspicious, and he's looking for him with a pitchfork. And make it real convincing, because we'll be holding the baby—out of sight."

"No—please—" she gasped. "Don't take her out of the kitchen. I promise you I won't say anything to him."

"Of course you won't," Finsome said soothingly. "We trust you implicitly. But there's no need for you to be as coarse as my friend has suggested. Tell him you're just about to give the baby a bath."

Grottersley looked past him through the window. "Here he is now," he said tensely. Down the rainswept road a red truck had appeared. Finsome picked up the carry-cot and made for the stairs, but Grottersley held him back.

"There's two of 'em," he said, pointing. "Look—the other's a cop. You can see his helmet through the windshield. The pig!"

The truck rolled up to the gate and stopped, and two figures in oilskins got out. Finsome passed the carry-cot to Grottersley,

awkwardly by its twin handles, nearly dropping the baby onto the stone floor. He shouldered the frantic Ella to one side and shot the bolt on the kitchen door.

"Watch it!" he whispered. "I'm warning you. Grottersley is holding the baby. Fourteen years—life—what's the difference? Don't try anything."

They went quickly through the door leading to the stairs. There was a peremptory rap at the other door.

"Sorry, Arthur," Ella called shakily. "You can't come in. I'm—I'm just going to give the baby a bath."

"Two of us here," said the mailman. "I've got the Law with me."

"Sergeant Hunt, Mrs. Carter," said another, more formal voice. "Just doing the rounds of the outlying farms. There's a couple of escaped prisoners on the run. You may have heard it on the radio—"

"I did," she said breathlessly.

"Nothing to worry about really. They wouldn't be fools enough to make for the moors in this weather," the policeman went on. "But it's best to be on the safe side. Keep your eyes open for any strangers hanging around, and warn Mr. Carter to do the same. If you do see anybody you don't recognize, get the station on the phone immediately. All right?"

"I'll do that," she answered, and some letters slid in under the door.

"Three bills and a circular," said the mailman. "Read 'em myself on the way up. So long."

"So long," Ella replied. She leaned against the door, her knees shaking under her. Squelching footsteps receded on the other side, then came the sound of the motor starting up, and the truck bumped slowly along the rutted farm road.

The two men came back into the kitchen. The baby, hungry, had started to wail complainingly. Ella flew at them and snatched the carry-cot from Grottersley, her eyes blazing hate. Finsome beamed.

"Splendid, my dear," he said enthusiastically. "A perfect performance. Now, a mite more of your willing cooperation and we'll be on our way. Tools—we need tools. Anything your husband has in the way of strong metal shears, files, that sort of thing—"

But she wasn't listening. She had the carry-cot beside her on a chair and she was once more heating the baby's food. Grottersley

stepped up to her and gripped her arm cruelly. She winced, but continued to stir the contents of the saucepan.

"We're talking to you, beautiful," he said. "Pay attention."

"They're in the shed outside," she told him.

"Well, go and get 'em." He started to push her toward the door, but she shook free and returned to her task. He swung, backhanded, knocking her across the room. She came hard up against the wall and slid down onto her knees. A thin trickle of blood appeared at the corner of her mouth. Finsome tut-tutted reproachfully.

"There's no need for that sort of thing—we hope," he said. "Run along and get them, there's a good girl."

She dragged herself to her feet, shaking her head slowly from side to side as if to clear it.

"The baby," she mumbled. "Let me take her with me. I'm not leaving her with—with him—"

"Now that's silly, isn't it?" Finsome chided her. "I'll look after the baby. Off you go. Hurry, dear, for your own sake. The sooner we're rid of these things, the sooner we'll be gone."

She hesitated a moment longer. Grottersley stepped toward her. She moved to the door, stifling a sob, and slid back the bolt and went out. The men moved to where they could keep her in view. They could see her in the open-fronted shed groping round the shelves inside and collecting what she found in a gunny sack.

She returned to them and Grottersley grabbed the sack and tipped the contents onto the floor. Ella went back to the stove. She wiped the blood from her mouth with her apron and taste-tested the heat of the food, then knelt beside the baby, coaxing her with the spoon.

"Pliers, two wrenches, a hammer, a bloody blunt saw, and two wood files," Grottersley raged at her. "Do you mean to say this is all you've got?"

"Not very promising," gloomed Finsome. "Are you sure there's nothing more there?" he asked over his shoulder.

"That's the lot," she said listlessly.

They toiled for over an hour, ruining the saw and rubbing the files smooth without any noticeable effect on the tough steel of the chain connecting the two handcuffs.

"Give us the hammer," Grottersley said at last. "You can spring the lock sometimes, if you know where to hit it."

They laid their wrists together on the hearthstone.

"Careful," quavered Finsome anxiously.

Grottersley struck a half dozen cautious blows on his own handcuff without success, then turned the heavy hammer onto that of Finsome's, with considerably more force. The fourth blow glanced off the steel and there was a spurt of blood from the older man's wrist. He bellowed and overbalanced, writhing on the floor in agony, and pulling Grottersley over with him.

Ella, nursing the baby to sleep in the rocker, slipped her quickly into the carry-cot and dove for the hammer, but Grottersley had regained his feet. He kicked her, catching her in the ribs. She gasped and tried to rise. He kicked again, harder, and she collapsed and lay still . . .

Reg Carter stopped at the gate and sounded the horn. Through the rain he could see the warm glow of the lamp in the kitchen window, but there was no answering movement inside. He sounded the horn again, waited, then got out, cursing, and opened the gate himself.

He drove through and garaged the truck in the shed, then gathered up some bundles and plowed through the mud to the kitchen door. He opened it and went in, shaking water from himself like a wet poodle.

"Why the hell didn't you open the gate for me?" he yelled angrily. Then a stone pickling jar hit his skull and he went down like a log. Grottersley grabbed him by the collar and pulled him across the kitchen and up the stairs, Finsome, his injured hand bound in a bloodstained towel, walking beside them, moaning.

They went into the bedroom. Ella, trussed and gagged on the bed, turned the whites of her eyes toward them. One-handed, Grottersley heaved Reg's inert body onto the bed beside her.

"Company for you," he grunted. "He ain't dead. The jerk ought to be—keeping a stinking set of tools like that around the house." He took the loose end of the clothesline that was binding Ella, and with his right hand and Finsome's left they managed to tie Carter securely. Then they returned downstairs. Grottersley doused the oil lamp and they went out to the truck. He opened the door on the passenger's side and grunted, "Get in first and move over to the wheel. What the hell are you waiting for?"

"How on earth do you expect *me* to drive?" snuffled Finsome. "One hand injured and the other shackled to you."

"You'll have to manage. Come on, get a move on."

"But I can't, you fool!" howled Finsome. "Don't you see—if I'm on the right our linked hands will be crossing in front of us. If you're behind the wheel our linked hands will be between us, and we can move the gearshift together—"

"But I can't drive," Grottersley told him, and the older man stared at him in dismay.

"You—you mean you don't know *how* to drive?" he gasped.

"S'right. Never had the chance to learn," Grottersley mumbled. "In stir when most kids of my age was getting their licenses—and I been in and out ever since. You know what it's like—"

"Oh, my God," moaned Finsome. "What a time to tell me this." He thought for some moments, then said, "Only one thing for it. The girl will have to drive."

"What if she makes a squawk, or jumps out or something when we get into traffic?" questioned Grottersley doubtfully.

"She won't—not if we've got the brat in the back with us," Finsome said positively, and the other gaped at him admiringly.

"Why the hell didn't we think of that in the first place?" he said. "Come on, let's get her."

They hurried back through the darkness, into the house and up the stairs.

"A little drive for you," Finsome explained as Grottersley untied her bonds. "And baby comes, too—and nothing will happen to her as long as you behave sensibly."

She was screaming incoherently even as Grottersley untied the silk stocking that was gagging her. "I won't—I won't, I tell you!"

Grottersley slapped her hard across the face. "All right then, stay here. But the kid goes with us, see?"

She rolled to the edge of the bed and tottered to her feet, biting back a moan as the circulation started again in her cramped limbs.

Five minutes later they were in the truck, Ella in front behind the wheel and the men in the back, with the baby warmly wrapped in everything woolen that Ella could find, crying complainingly in the carry-cot between them.

"Shove something over her mouth, for God's sake," Finsome said irritably and Ella screamed again.

"No—no—you'll smother her," she cried out. "Let her ride in front with me—I'll keep her quiet—"

"Get on with it or I'll go to work on her," Grottersley threatened.

The faulty starter jammed and under her inexpert directions they had to climb out again and rock the truck into second gear to free it. The motor started finally and she backed out, swung around, and headed for the gate.

"You'll have to get out and open it," she shouted to them. "If I take my foot off she'll stall."

Raging and cursing they climbed over the tailboard again, but they took the carry-cot with them, and her half-formed plan to make a dash for it was stillborn.

"We're going to Portsmouth," Finsome told her as they climbed in again. "There's an all-night diner there called Jack's Snackery, just outside town."

"Portsmouth?" she gasped. "But that's over a hundred miles away."

"Then you'd better step on it," Grottersley said. "And listen—if we're stopped tell 'em your old man has had an accident and you're going for the doctor."

"That might send them to the farm," Finsome said. "No—a sick animal. You're going to the vet for some medicine."

A light swung slowly from side to side signaling them to halt as they turned onto the main road six miles farther on. Grottersley, on his knees behind her, chattered with terror. Finsome pulled him down beside him onto the floor of the truck, under some empty wheat sacks.

"Tell them," he ground out. "And make it convincing. I'm warning you—if they look inside the kid's done for."

It was the police, but represented only by a very wet Sergeant Hunt. He came up to the truck and raised his lamp.

"Oh, it's you, Mrs. Carter," he said, surprised.

"Don't stop me," she begged. "The ewe is sick. Medicine from the vet. My husband is sitting up with her—"

He stepped back and waved her on. From the back came vague noises of approval and relief as the truck sped down the main road.

"Keep it like that," Grottersley said, "and nobody's going to get hurt."

But ten miles farther on she fumbled a gear change; the truck stalled and the starter jammed again. She put it into reverse and let it run backward down the rear slope, slipping her clutch as she had seen her husband do; but she misjudged and the rear wheels finished in the roadside ditch.

Screaming obscenely, the men got out, taking the carry-cot with them and putting it over the hedge into a field; but nothing they could do would rock the starter free this time. The rain was coming down in a solid sheet now, and Ella was sobbing frantically. "The baby! The baby! She'll catch her death of cold! Please—please put her back inside. I'll do anything—anything—"

"Then *do* it!" Grottersley shouted, punching her hard.

She remembered then in her extremity. "It's a thing called the bendix drive," she said. "My husband puts a screwdriver in and pushes against something and—"

"Don't talk about it! Get on with it!" yelled Finsome.

She fumbled in the toolbox and ran round to the front of the truck and raised the heavy, rearhinged hood, propping it up on its strut. She made ineffectual jabs at the flywheel casing—and then, like a blinding flash of light, the idea came to her. She straightened and turned to the two men crowding close in on her.

"It's no good," she said. "My hand's not strong enough. I'll show you where it is. If one of you—"

"Give me the bloody thing," snarled Grottersley, and snatched the screwdriver from her.

"There," pointed out Ella. She guided his free right hand down into the dark cavern of the engine space. "If you'll hold it—"

She jumped back, sweeping the strut away, and the heavy hood clanged down, and her whole weight was on it, and Grottersley was screaming and trying to push her away with his other hand; but Finsome was shackled to that one, and he wasn't cooperating—and the night was being split with their concerted howls of pain when the police car swept up.

Ella was crooning over the baby in the back seat of the police car. In front a policeman was talking into a microphone.

"The woman and the baby are all right, but one of the blokes has got his hand just about chopped off, and the other seems to have gone nuts. Hurry with that ambulance. Over."

"There, there, my precious," whispered Ella. "Silly men shouting and making all that fuss about nothing—and frightening Mummy's little darling."

"Q"

Ellery Queen

Mystery at the Library of Congress

In which Ellery seeks the tantalizing clue that would help break an international dope ring . . .

Detective: ELLERY QUEEN

Ellery responded to Inspector Terence Fineberg's invitation with pleasure. Fineberg, in charge of the Central Office, was one of Inspector Queen's ancient beat-buddies, and he used to slip Ellery candy bars. He detested amateur detectives, so the old mink must be desperate.

"Park it," Inspector Fineberg said, blowing hot and cold. "You know Inspector Pete Santoria of the Narcotics Squad?"

Ellery nodded to the stone-jawed Narcotics man.

"We'll skip the protocol, Ellery," Fineberg went on, gnashing his dentures. "Calling you in wasn't our idea. The big brass thought this case could use your screwb—your God-given talents."

"I'm ever at the beck of the law enforcement arm," Ellery said kindly, "especially when it's grasping at straws. You may fire when ready, Finey."

"The buck," Fineberg shouted to Inspector Santoria, "is yours."

Santoria said in tooth-sucking tones, "We got a line on a new dope ring, Queen. The junk is coming in, we think, from France, and in kilo lots. New York is the distribution depot. None of the lower echelons knows any of the others except the few in immediate contact. We want the big boy on the New York end. That this gang aren't regulars is about all we know for sure."

"Of course they're no regulars," the Central Office head grumbled. "Who ever heard of a regular dope-running crumbum who could read?"

"Read?" Ellery came to a point like a bird-dog. "Read what, Finey?"

"Books, for gossakes!"

"Don't tell me we authors are now being blamed for the narcotics traffic, too," Ellery said coldly. "How do books come into this?"

"Using 'em as a code!" Terence Fineberg implored the ceiling to witness. "An information-passing operation is going on down in Washington that's an intermediate step between shipment and delivery. The Federal Bureau of Narcotics got on the trail of the D.C. members of the ring—two of 'em, anyway—and they're both being watched."

"One of the two," Inspector Santoria took it up, "is a colorless little shnook named Balcom who works for a Washington travel agency. He used to be a high school English teacher. The other—a girl named Norma Shuffling—is employed at the Library of Congress."

"The Library's being used as the contact rendezvous?"

"Yes. Balcom's job is to pass along the information as to when, where, and how a new shipment is coming into New York. The contact to whom he has to pass the information is identified for Balcom by the Shuffling girl. They play it cool—a different contact is used every time."

Ellery shrugged. "All you have to do is spot one as the Shuffling girl points him out to Balcom—"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Queen," the Narcotics chief said, sounding like the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel*. "Want a go at it?"

"Just what takes place?" Ellery asked intently.

Inspector Fineberg's glance quelled Santoria. "Balcom visits the Library only when the girl is on duty—she works out of the main desk filling call slips and bringing the books onto the floor. Balcom takes either Desk One Forty-seven or, if that's occupied, the nearest one that's vacant. When Shuffling spies him she brings him some books conforming to slips filled out by her in advance. It's the titles of the books that tip him off—she never communicates with him in any other way."

"Titles," Ellery said, nuzzling the word. "What does Balcom do?"

"He looks the books over, then takes an easy gander around his immediate neighborhood. And that's all. After that he just sits there reading, doesn't take his eyes off his books, till closing time, when he gets up and goes home."

"The Library bit is just so Balcom can identify the messenger," Inspector Santoria said. "The actual passage of the information is made at a different meet."

"But if Balcom's being watched—"

"He works for a travel agency, I told you! Any idea how many people he comes in contact with daily?"

"We figure it works like this, Ellery," the Central Office head explained. "After a session at the Library—the next morning, say—the messenger that this Norma Shuffling identified for Balcom through the book titles shows up at the travel agency as a customer. Balcom recognizes him and passes him a legitimate ticket envelope, only it contains not just plane or railroad tickets, but the dope shipment info, too."

"And if you could spot one of these contacts—".

"We could track Balcom's message to its destination. That would be Big Stuff himself, who's sure as hell covered behind a smart front here in New York."

A contact and shipment, Ellery learned, occurred about once every ten days. The Federals had set up their first stakeout a month before, and at that time Miss Shuffling had brought three books to Balcom's desk.

"What were they?"

Inspector Santoria fished a report from a folder. "Steve Allen's *The Funny Men*, Count Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, and Sigmund Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*."

"Lovely!" Ellery murmured. "Allen, Tolstoy, Freud . . . Well." He seemed disappointed. "It's simple enough. A kindergarten acrostic—"

"Sure," Terence Fineberg retorted. "F for Freud, A for Allen, T for Tolstoy. F-A-T. There was a three-hundred-pound character sitting near Balcom."

"The trouble was," Santoria said, "the Feds and we weren't on to the system that first time, and by the time we'd figured it out the fat guy had already got his info from Balcom and taken off."

"What about the second contact?"

"Three books again. Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*, George R. Stewart's *Fire*, and Ben Hecht's *Actor's Blood*."

"C-S-H. No acrostic there. Changed the system . . ." Ellery frowned. "Must be in the titles—something in common . . . Was there an American Indian sitting near Balcom on that visit? Or someone with red hair?"

"Quick, isn't he, Pete?" Inspector Fineberg asked sourly. "Yeah, we saw that—cherries, fire, blood are all red. It was an old dame with dyed red hair sitting a couple seats from Balcom. Only again

we doped it out too late to cover the actual contact. The third time we missed clean."

"Ah, couldn't find the common denominator."

"What common denominator?" Santoria asked angrily. "You got to have at least two items for that!"

"There was only *one* book the third time?"

"Right! I still say the doll got suspicious and never brought the other books. But do you think the brass would listen to me? No, they got to call in a screwb—an expert!"

"The thing is, Ellery," Inspector Fineberg said, "we do have evidence that a third shipment was picked up, which means a contact *was* made after that one-book deal."

"They did it some other way, Terence!" Santoria snapped.

"Sure, Pete, sure," Fineberg said soothingly. "I go along with you. Only the brass don't. They want Brains working on this. Who are we to reason why?"

"What was the book?" Ellery asked.

"Rudyard Kipling's *The Light That Failed*."

Santoria growled. "We waited around the whole damn afternoon while people came and went—what a turnover they get down there—and our boy Balcom sits there at Desk One Forty-seven reading the Kipling book from cover to cover like he was enjoying it!"

The Light That Failed was about a man who went blind. Was there someone in the vicinity wearing dark glasses, or immersed in a volume of Braille?"

"No blind people, no cheaters, no Braille, no nothing."

Ellery mused. "Do you have a written report of that visit?"

Santoria dug out another folder. Ellery glanced through it. It was a detailed account of the third Balcom-Shuffling contact, complete with descriptions of suspects, unclassified incidents, and so on. Ellery emerged from this rubble bearing a nugget.

"Of course," he said gently. "The one book by Kipling was all Balcom needed that day. A saintly-looking old gent wearing a clerical collar was consulting a card catalogue within view of Balcom and absentmindedly filled his pipe. He was flipping the wheel of his pocket lighter—flipped it unsuccessfully several times, it says here, boys—when a guard walked over and stopped him. The old fellow apologized for his absent-mindedness, put the lighter and pipe away, and went on consulting the index cards. *The Light That Failed*."

"Lemme see that!" Fineberg snatched the folder, red in the face. "Pete," he howled, "how the devil did we miss that?"

"We thought sure there'd be more books, Terence," Inspector Santoria stammered. "And the old guy was a preacher—"

"The old guy was a phony! Look, Ellery, maybe you can help us at that. We've been slow on the uptake—books yet! If on the next meet you could be sitting near Balcom and spot the contact man right away—how about it?"

"You couldn't keep me out of this with a court order, Finey," Ellery assured him. "What's more, it won't cost the City of New York a plugged subway token—I'll pay my own expenses to Washington. Can you arrange it with the Feds?"

Inspector Fineberg arranged it with the Feds, and on Monday of the following week Ellery was snugged down one desk behind and to the right of Desk 147 in the main reading room of the venerable gray Renaissance building east of the Capitol in downtown Washington. One of his fellow stakeout men, a balding Federal Narcotics agent named Hauck, who looked like a senior accountant in a wholesale drygoods firm, was parked in the outermost concentric circle of desks, near the entrance; they could signal each other by a half turn of the head. Another Federal agent and Inspector Santoria lounged around outside making like camera bugs.

Ellery's desk was loaded with reference books, for he was being an Author in Search of Material, a role he had often played at the Library of Congress in earnest.

He had filed his slips at the main desk with Norma Shuffling, whose photo—along with Balcom's—he had studied at the Federal Bureau. When she brought the books to his desk he was able to get a close look. Tense and sad-looking, she was a pretty, dark-eyed girl who had been at some pains to camouflage her prettiness. Ellery wondered how she had come to be mixed up in an international dope operation; she could not have been more than twenty years old.

The little travel agent, Balcom, did not appear that day. Ellery had not expected him to, for the Federal men had said that Balcom visited the Library only on his days off, which were unpredictable. Today he was reported swamped at the office by a tidal wave of travel orders.

"But it's got to be soon, Queen," Inspector Santoria said Monday night in Ellery's room at the Hotel Mayflower. "Tomorrow's

the eleventh day since the last meet, and they've never gone this long before."

"Balcom may not be able to get away from his office."

"He'll manage it," Agent Hauck said grimly.

Early the next morning Ellery's phone rang. It was Santoria. "I just got the word from Hauck. It's today."

"How's Balcom managing it?"

"He's reported out sick. Better get on over to the Library."

Norma Shuffling was bringing Ellery an armful of books when a little man with mousy eyes and mousy hair, dressed in a mousy business suit, pat-patted past Ellery's desk and slipped into the seat of Desk 147. Ellery did not need Hauck's pencil-to-nose signal to identify the newcomer. It was Balcom.

The Shuffling girl passed Desk 147 without a glance. She placed Ellery's books softly before him and returned to her station. Ellery began to turn pages.

It was fascinating to watch them. Balcom and the girl might have inhabited different planets. Balcom-stared at the encircling walls, the very picture of a man waiting. Not once did he look toward the main desk. There, her back to him, the pretty girl was quietly busy.

The reading room began to fill.

Ellery continued to study the two of them from above his book. Balcom had his dainty hands clasped on his desk now; he seemed to be dozing. Norma Shuffling was fetching books, working on the floor dozens of feet away.

A quarter of an hour passed.

Ellery sneaked an inventory of the readers in the vicinity. To Balcom's left sat a buxom woman in a smart strawberry silk suit; she wore bifocals and was raptly reading a volume of industrial reports.

To Balcom's right a very large man with wrestler's shoulders and no hair was absorbed in a three-volume set on African lovebirds.

Beyond the bird-lover a sloppily dressed Latin who looked like Fidel Castro's double was making secretive notes from some ancient *National Geographics*.

Near the Cuban-looking man sat a thin elongated lady with a lavender-rinse hairdo who reminded Ellery of Miss Hildegarde Withers; she was intent on the *Congressional Record*.

Also in the neighborhood were a scowling young priest who was leafing through a book on demonology; a Man of Distinction with a gray crewcut and an egg-spattered necktie who was frankly dozing; and a young lady with hearing-aid eyeglasses and some blue ink on one nostril who was copying something from a book on naval ordnance as if her life depended on it.

Suddenly the Shuffling girl started up the aisle. She was carrying a thick, oversized book.

Ellery turned a page. Was this it?

It was!

Miss Shuffling paused at Desk 147, placed the book deftly before Balcom, and walked away.

Balcom unclasped his little hands and opened the book to the title page.

The Complete Shakespeare.

The Complete Shakespeare?

Balcom began to idle through the volume. He made no attempt to survey his fellow readers.

Shakespeare . . . Some relevant quotation? Not likely, with thousands to cull.

Ellery concentrated.

Plays? A playwright? An actor? Nothing about anyone in the vicinity suggested the theater. Moreover, Balcom seemed obviously to be waiting.

Ten minutes later Miss Shuffling silently laid another book on Desk 147 and as silently took herself off.

This time Balcom reached for the book with something like eagerness. Ellery craned.

Shaw . . . Shaw's *Man and Superman*.

A playwright again! But how could you make an instant identification of a playwright—or an actor, for that matter? Ellery glanced about under the pretext of stretching. No one within eyeshot was even reading a play.

Shakespeare—Shaw. Initials? S. S. SS! An ex-Nazi Storm Trooper? The big bald wrestlerish character who was interested in African lovebirds? Possibly, but how could anyone be sure? It had to be something Balcom could interpret with certainty at a glance. Besides, the fellow didn't look Teutonic, but Slavic.

Shakespeare, Shaw . . . English literature. An Englishman? No one Ellery could see looked English, although any of them might be. Besides, Shaw was really Irish.

Man and Superman? Somehow that didn't fit in with Shakespeare.

Ellery shook his head. What the deuce was the girl trying to convey to Balcom?

Balcom was now reading Shaw with concentration. But then he had to keep doing something. Was he waiting for another volume? Or would he soon look around and spot the contact?

If he does, Ellery thought with exasperation, he's a better man than I am!

But Balcom did not look up from the Shaw book. He was showing no curiosity about his neighbors, so Ellery decided that he was expecting another book . . .

Yes, a third book was coming!

The Shuffling girl placed it on Desk 147. Ellery could barely contain himself.

He read the title almost simultaneously with Balcom, blessing his sharp eyesight.

Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant.

Blam went his theories! Shakespeare and Shaw, playwrights; Grant, a military man. S, S, now G. One Englishman, one Irishman, one American.

What did it all add up to?

Ellery couldn't think of a thing. He could feel Agent Hauck's eyes boring critical holes in his back.

And the minutes went bucketing by.

He now studied Balcom with ferocity. Did the three books mean anything to him? Not yet. Balcom was in trouble, too, as he pretended to glance through the Grant autobiography. Puzzlement showed in every slightest movement.

Shakespeare . . . Shaw . . . General Grant . . .

Balcom had it!

He was now looking around casually, his gaze never lingering, as if one glimpse was all he needed.

Ellery struggled with panic. Any moment Balcom's contact might get up and leave, knowing Balcom had spotted him. People were constantly coming and going; it would be impossible to identify the right one without the clue conveyed by the books. Ellery could already hear Inspector Santoria's horse laugh . . .

And then—O blessed!—he had it, too!

Ellery rose. He plucked his hat from the desk, strolled up the aisle past Agent Hauck, who had chewed his pencil eraser to

crumbs, and went out into the Washington sunshine. Inspector Santoria and the other Federal man were seated in an unmarked car now, and Ellery slipped into the rear seat.

"Well?" the Federal man demanded. The Feds had been polite, but skeptical, over the New York brass's inspiration.

"Wait for Hauck."

Agent Hauck came out two minutes later., He paused near the car to light a cigaret, and Ellery said, "Get set for the tail. The contact is sitting two seats over to Balcom's right in the same row. He's the sloppy little Cuban type."

"Afternoon, Finey," Ellery said on Friday of that week. "Don't tell me. You're stumped again."

"No, no, haha, sit down, my boy," Inspector Terence Fineberg said cordially. "You're ace-high around here! Thought you'd like to know Pete Santoria collared Big Stuff two hours ago in the act of taking possession of a shipment of H. The Feds are out right now picking up Balcom and the girl. By the way, that little Havana number who led us to him was never closer to Cuba than an El Stinko cigar. He's a poolroom punk name of Harry Hummelmayer from the Red Hook section of Brooklyn."

Ellery nodded unenthusiastically. The spirit of the chase had long since left him. "Well, Finey, congratulations and all that. Was there something else? I have a date with four walls and an empty typewriter."

"Wait, Ellery, for gossakes! I've been going Nutsville trying to figure out a connection between Shakespeare, Shaw, and old man Grant. Even knowing the contact was Hummelmayer, I can't see what the three have in common."

"With Hummelmayer looking like Fidel Castro?" Ellery reached over the desk and, gripping Inspector Fineberg's knotty chin firmly, waggled it. "Beards, Finey, beards."

"Q"

Ed McBain

Nightshade

A short novel, complete in this anthology, about the 87th Precinct . . . one night in the lives and deaths of the men of the 87th—detectives Steve Carella, Cotton Hawes, Bert Kling, Meyer Meyer, and the rest of the squad . . . one night that is a microcosm of a metropolis—a mosaic of murder, vandalism, ghosts (!), bombing, theft, of missing persons, junkies, pushers, drunk-and-disorderlies, burglars, muggers—you name it, it swims into the orbit of a Precinct Station in a big city when "paradoxically, the night people take over in the morning."

A strictly American police procedural, with the hard smack of realism and the interweaving, intertwining, interacting, interlinking of all-in-the-night's-work at the 87th Precinct . . .

Detectives: 87th PRECINCT

The morning hours of the night come imperceptibly here.

It is a minute before midnight on the peeling face of the hanging wall clock, and then it is midnight, and then the minute hand moves visibly and with a lurch into the new day. The morning hours have begun, but scarcely anyone has noticed. The stale coffee in soggy cardboard containers tastes the same as it did thirty seconds ago, the spastic rhythm of the clacking typewriters continues unabated, a drunk across the room shouts that the world is full of brutality, and cigarette smoke drifts up toward the face of the clock where, unnoticed and unmourned, the old day has already been dead for two minutes.

Then the telephone rings.

The men in this room are part of a tired routine, somewhat shabby about the edges, as faded and as gloomy as the room itself, with its cigarette-scarred desks and its smudged green walls. This could be the office of a failing insurance company were it not for the evidence of the holstered pistols hanging from belts on the

backs of wooden chairs painted a darker green than the walls. The furniture is ancient, the typewriters are ancient, the building itself is ancient—which is perhaps only fitting since these men are involved in what is an ancient pursuit, a pursuit once considered honorable. They are law enforcers. They are, in the mildest words of the drunk still hurling epithets from the grilled detention cage across the room, dirty rotten pigs.

The telephone continues to ring.

The little girl lying in the alley behind the theater was wearing a belted white trench coat wet with blood. There was blood on the floor of the alley, and blood on the metal fire door behind her, and blood on her face and matted in her blonde hair, blood on her miniskirt and on the lavender tights she wore. A neon sign across the street stained the girl's ebbing life juices green and then orange, while from the open knife wound in her chest the blood sprouted like some ghastly night flower, dark and rich, red, orange, green, pulsing in time to the neon flicker—a grotesque, psychedelic light show, and then losing the rhythm, welling up with less force and power.

She opened her mouth, she tried to speak, and the scream of an ambulance approaching the theater seemed to come from her mouth on a fresh bubble of blood. The blood stopped, her life ended, the girl's eyes rolled back into her head.

Detective Steve Carella turned away as the ambulance attendants rushed a stretcher into the alley. He told them the girl was dead.

"We got here in seven minutes," one of the attendants said.

"Nobody's blaming you," Carella answered.

"This is Saturday night," the attendant complained. "Streets are full of traffic. Even with the damn siren."

Carella walked to the unmarked sedan parked at the curb. Detective Cotton Hawes, sitting behind the wheel, rolled down his frostrimmed window and said, "How is she?"

"We've got a homicide," Carella answered.

The boy was 18 years old, and he had been picked up not ten minutes ago for breaking off car aerials. He had broken off twelve on the same street, strewing them behind him like a Johnny Appleseed planting radios; a cruising squad car had spotted him as he tried to twist off the aerial of a 1966 Cadillac. He was drunk

or stoned or both, and when Sergeant Murchison at the muster desk asked him to read the Miranda-Escobedo warning signs on the wall, printed in both English and Spanish, he could read neither.

The arresting patrolman took the boy to the squadroom upstairs, where Detective Bert Kling was talking to Hawes on the telephone. Kling signaled for the patrolman to wait with his prisoner on the bench outside the slatted wooden rail divider, and then buzzed Murchison at the desk downstairs.

"Dave," he said, "we've got a homicide in the alley of the Eleventh Street Theater. You want to get it rolling?"

"Right," Murchison said, and hung up.

Homicides are a common occurrence in this city, and each one is treated identically, the grisly horror of violent death reduced to routine by a police force that would otherwise be overwhelmed by statistics. At the muster desk upstairs Kling waved the patrolman and his prisoner into the squadroom. Sergeant Murchison first reported the murder to Captain Frick, who commanded the 87th Precinct, and then to Lieutenant Byrnes, who commanded the 87th Detective Squad. He then phoned Homicide, who in turn set into motion an escalating process of notification that included the Police Laboratory, the Telegraph, Telephone and Teletype Bureau at Headquarters, the Medical Examiner, the District Attorney, the District Commander of the Detective Division, the Chief of Detectives, and finally the Police Commissioner himself. Someone had thoughtlessly robbed a young woman of her life, and now a lot of sleepy-eyed men were being shaken out of their beds on a cold October night.

Upstairs, the clock on the squadroom wall read 12:30 A.M. The boy who had broken off twelve car aerials sat in a chair alongside Bert Kling's desk. Kling took one look at him and yelled to Miscolo in the Clerical Office to bring in a pot of strong coffee. Across the room the drunk in the detention cage wanted to know where he was. In a little while they would release him with a warning to try to stay sober till morning.

But the night was young.

They arrived alone or in pairs, blowing on their hands, shoulders hunched against the bitter cold, breaths pluming whitely from their lips. They marked the dead girl's position in the alleyway, they took her picture, they made drawings of the scene, they

searched for the murder weapon and found none, and then they stood around speculating on sudden death. In this alleyway alongside a theater the policemen were the stars and the celebrities, and a curious crowd thronged the sidewalk where a barricade had already been set up, anxious for a glimpse of these men with their shields pinned to their overcoats—the identifying Playbills of law enforcement, without which you could not tell the civilians from the plainclothes cops.

Monaghan and Monroe had arrived from Homicide, and they watched dispassionately now as the Assistant Medical Examiner fluttered around the dead girl. They were both wearing black overcoats, black mufflers, and black fedoras; both were heavier men than Carella who stood between them with the lean look of an overtrained athlete, a pained expression on his face.

"He done some job on her," Monroe said.

Monaghan made a rude sound.

"You identified her yet?" Monroe asked.

"I'm waiting for the M.E. to get through," Carella answered.

"Might help to know what she was doing here in the alley. What's that door there?" Monaghan asked.

"Stage entrance."

"Think she was in the show?"

"I don't know," Carella said.

"Well, what the hell," Monroe said, "they're finished with her pocketbook there, ain't they? Why don't you look through it? You finished with that pocketbook there?" he yelled to one of the lab technicians.

"Yeah, anytime you want it," the technician shouted back.

"Go on, Carella, take a look."

The technician wiped the blood off the dead girl's bag, then handed it to Carella. Monaghan and Monroe crowded in on him as he twisted open the clasp.

"Bring it over to the light," Monroe said.

The light, with a metal shade, hung over the stage door. So violently had the girl been stabbed that flecks of blood had even dotted the enameled white underside of the shade. In her bag they found a driver's license identifying her as Mercy Howell of 1113 Rutherford Avenue, Age 24, Height 5' 3", Eyes Blue. They found an Actors Equity card in her name, as well as credit cards for two of the city's largest department stores. They found an unopened package of Virginia Slims, and a book of matches advertising an

art course. They found a rat-tailed comb. They found \$17.43. They found a package of Kleenex, and an appointment book. They found a ballpoint pen with shreds of tobacco clinging to its tip, an eyelash curler, two subway tokens, and an advertisement for a see-through blouse, clipped from one of the local newspapers.

In the pocket of her trench coat, when the M.E. had finished with her and pronounced her dead from multiple stab wounds in the chest and throat, they found an unfired Browning .25 caliber automatic. They tagged the gun and the handbag, and they moved the girl out of the alleyway and into the waiting ambulance for removal to the morgue. There was now nothing left of Mercy Howell but a chalked outline of her body and a pool of her blood on the alley floor.

"You sober enough to understand me?" Kling asked the boy.

"I was never drunk to begin with," the boy answered.

"Okay then, here we go," Kling said. "In keeping with the Supreme Court decision in *Miranda versus Arizona* we are not permitted to ask you any questions until you are warned of your right to counsel and your privilege against self-incrimination."

"What does that mean?" the boy asked. "Self-incrimination?"

"I'm about to explain that to you now," Kling said.

"This coffee stinks."

"First, you have the right to remain silent if you so choose," Kling said. "Do you understand that?"

"I understand it."

"Second, you do not have to answer any police questions if you don't want to. Do you understand that?"

"What the hell are you asking me if I understand for? Do I look like a moron or something?"

"The law requires that I ask whether or not you understand these specific warnings. *Did* you understand what I just said about not having to answer?"

"Yeah, yeah, I understood."

"All right. Third, if you do decide to answer any questions, the answers may be used as evidence against you, do you—?"

"What the hell did I do, break off a couple of lousy car aerials?"

"Did you understand that?"

"I understood it."

"You also have the right to consult with an attorney before or during police questioning. If you do not have the money to hire a

lawyer, a lawyer will be appointed to consult with you."

Kling gave this warning straight-faced even though he knew that under the Criminal Procedure Code of the city for which he worked, a public defender could not be appointed by the courts until the preliminary hearing. There was no legal provision for the courts or the police to appoint counsel during questioning, and there were certainly no police funds set aside for the appointment of attorneys. In theory, a call to the Legal Aid Society should have brought a lawyer up there to the old squadron within minutes, ready and eager to offer counsel to any indigent person desiring it. But in practice, if this boy sitting beside Kling told him in the next three seconds that he was unable to pay for his own attorney and would like one provided, Kling would not have known just what to do—other than call off the questioning.

"I understand," the boy said.

"You've signified that you understand all the warnings," Kling said, "and now I ask you whether you are willing to answer my questions without an attorney here to counsel you."

"Go fly a kite," the boy said. "I don't want to answer nothing."

So that was that.

They booked him for Criminal Mischief, a Class-A Misdemeanor defined as intentional or reckless damage to the property of another person, and they took him downstairs to a holding cell, to await transport to the Criminal Courts Building for arraignment.

The phone was ringing again, and a woman was waiting on the bench just outside the squadroom.

The watchman's booth was just inside the metal stage door. An electric clock on the wall behind the watchman's stool read 1:10 A.M. The watchman was a man in his late seventies who did not at all mind being questioned by the police. He came on duty, he told them, at 7:30 each night. The company call was for 8:00, and he was there at the stage door waiting to greet everybody as they arrived to get made up and in costume. Curtain went down at 11:20, and usually most of the kids was out of the theater by 11:45 or, at the latest, midnight. He stayed on till 9:00 the next morning, when the theater box office opened.

"Ain't much to do during the night except hang around and make sure nobody runs off with the scenery," he said, chuckling.

"Did you happen to notice what time Mercy Howell left the theater?" Carella asked.

"She the one got killed?" the old man asked.

"Yes," Hawes said. "Mercy Howell. About this high, blonde hair, blue eyes."

"They're all about—that high, with blonde hair and blue eyes," the old man said, and chuckled again. "I don't know hardly none of them by name. Shows come and go, you know. Be a hell of a chore to have to remember all the kids who go in and out that door."

"Do you sit here by the door all night?" Carella asked.

"Well, no, not all night. What I do, I lock the door after everybody's out and then I check the lights, make sure just the work light's on. I won't touch the switchboard, not allowed to, but I can turn out lights in the lobby, for example, if somebody left them on, or down in the toilets—sometimes they leave lights on down in the toilets. Then I come back here to the booth, and read or listen to the radio. Along about two o'clock I check the theater again, make sure we ain't got no fires or nothing, and then I come back here and make the rounds again at four o'clock, and six o'clock, and again about eight. That's what I do."

"You say you lock this door?"

"That's right."

"Would you remember what time you locked it tonight?"

"Oh, must've been about ten minutes to twelve. Soon as I knew everybody was out."

"How do you know when they're out?"

"I give a yell up the stairs there. You see those stairs there? They go up to the dressing rooms. Dressing rooms are all upstairs in this house. So I go to the steps, and I yell, 'Locking up! Anybody here?' And if somebody yells back, I know somebody's here, and I say, 'Let's shake it, honey,' if it's a girl, and if it's a boy, I say, 'Let's hurry it up, sonny.' " The old man chuckled again. "With this show it's sometimes hard to tell which's the girls and which's the boys. I manage, though," he said, and again chuckled.

"So you locked the door at ten minutes to twelve?"

"Right."

"And everybody had left the theater by that time?"

"Cept me, of course."

"Did you look out into the alley before you locked the door?"

"Nope. Why should I do that?"

"Did you hear anything outside *while* you were locking the door?"

"Nope."

"Or at any time *before* you locked it?"

"Well, there's always noise outside when they're leaving, you know. They got friends waiting for them, or else they go home together, you know—there's always a lot of chatter when they go out."

"But it was quiet when you locked the door?"

"Dead quiet," the old man said.

The woman who took the chair beside Detective Meyer Meyer's desk was perhaps 32 years old, with long straight black hair trailing down her back, and wide brown eyes that were terrified. It was still October, and the color of her tailored coat seemed suited to the season, a subtle tangerine with a small brown fur collar that echoed an outdoors trembling with the colors of autumn.

"I feel sort of silly about this," she said, "but my husband insisted that I come."

"I see," Meyer said.

"There are ghosts," the woman said.

Across the room Kling unlocked the door to the detention cage and said, "Okay, pal, on your way. Try to stay sober till morning, huh?"

"It ain't one thirty yet," the man said. "The night is young." He stepped out of the cage, tipped his hat to Kling, and hurriedly left the squadroom.

Meyer looked at the woman sitting beside him, studying her with new interest because, to tell the truth, she had not seemed like a nut when she first walked into the squadroom. He had been a detective for more years than he chose to count, and in his time had met far too many nuts of every stripe and persuasion. But he had never met one as pretty as Adele Gorman with her well-tailored, fur-collared coat, and her Vassar voice and her skillfully applied eye makeup, lips bare of color in her pale white face, pert and reasonably young and seemingly intelligent—but apparently a nut besides.

"In the house," she said. "Ghosts."

"Where do you live, ma'am?" he asked. He had written her name on the pad in front of him, and now he watched her with his pencil poised and recalled the lady who had come into the squadroom only last month to report a gorilla peering into her bedroom from the fire escape outside. They had sent a patrolman

over to make a routine check, and had even called the zoo and the circus (which coincidentally was in town, and which lent at least some measure of credibility to her claim), but there had been no gorilla on the fire escape, nor had any gorilla recently escaped from a cage. The lady came back the next day to report that her visiting gorilla had put in another appearance the night before, this time wearing a top hat and carrying a black cane with an ivory head. Meyer had assured her that he would have a platoon of cops watching her building that night, which seemed to calm her at least somewhat. He had then led her personally out of the squadroom and down the iron-runged steps, and through the high-ceilinged muster room, and past the hanging green globes on the front stoop, and onto the sidewalk outside the station house. Sergeant Murchison, at the muster desk, shook his head after the lady was gone, and muttered; "More of them outside than in."

Meyer watched Adele Gorman now, remembered what Murchison had said, and thought: *Gorillas in September, ghosts in October.*

"We live in Smoke Rise," she said. "Actually, it's my father's house, but my husband and I are living there with him."

"The address?"

"MacArthur Lane—number three hundred seventy-four. You take the first access road into Smoke Rise, about a mile and a half east of Silvermine Oval. The name on the mailbox is Van Houten. That's my father's name. Willem Van Houten." She paused and studied him, as though expecting some reaction.

"Okay," Meyer said, and ran a hand over his bald pate. He looked up and said, "Now, you were saying, Mrs. Gorman—"

"That we have ghosts."

"Uh-huh. What kind of ghosts?"

"Ghosts. Poltergeists. Shades. I don't know," she said, and shrugged. "What kinds of ghosts are there?"

"Well, they're your ghosts, so suppose you tell me," Meyer said.

The telephone on Kling's desk rang. He lifted the receiver and said, "Eighty-seventh, Detective Kling."

"There are two of them," Adele said.

"Male or female?"

"One of each."

"Yeah," Kling said into the telephone, "go ahead."

"How old would you say they were?"

"Centuries, I would guess."

"No, I mean—"

"Oh, how old do they look? Well, the man—"

"You've seen them?"

"Oh, yes, many times."

"Uh-huh," Meyer said.

"I'll be right over," Kling said into the telephone. "You stay there." He slammed down the receiver, opened his desk drawer, pulled out a holstered revolver, and hurriedly clipped it to his belt. "Somebody threw a bomb into a store-front church. One-seven-three-three Culver Avenue. I'm heading over."

"Right," Meyer said. "Get back to me."

"We'll need a couple of meat wagons. The minister and two others were killed, and it sounds as if there're a lot of injured."

"Will you tell Dave?"

"On the way out," Kling said, and was gone.

"Mrs. Gorman," Meyer said, "as you can see, we're pretty busy here just now. I wonder if your ghosts can wait till morning."

"No, they can't," Adele said.

"Why not?"

"Because they appear precisely at two forty-five A.M. and I want someone to see them."

"Why don't you and your husband look at them?" Meyer said.

"You think I'm a nut, don't you?" Adele said.

"No, no, Mrs. Gorman, not at all."

"Oh, yes you do," Adele said. "I didn't believe in ghosts either—until I saw these two."

"Well, this is all very interesting, I assure you, Mrs. Gorman, but really we do have our hands full right now, and I don't know what we can do about these ghosts of yours, even if we did come over to take a look at them."

"They've been stealing things from us," Adele said, and Meyer thought: *Oh, we have got ourselves a prime lunatic this time.*

"What sort of things?"

"A diamond brooch that used to belong to my mother when she was alive. They stole that from my father's safe."

"What else?"

"A pair of emerald earrings. They were in the safe, too."

"When did these thefts occur?"

"Last month."

"Isn't it possible the jewelry's been mislaid?"

"You don't mislay a diamond brooch and a pair of emerald ear-

rings that are locked inside a wall safe."

"Did you report these thefts?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because I knew you'd think I was crazy. Which is just what you're thinking right this minute."

"No, Mrs. Gorman, but I'm sure you can appreciate the fact that we—uh—can't go around arresting ghosts," Meyer said, and tried a smile.

Adele Gorman did not smile back. "Forget the ghosts," she said, "I was foolish to mention them. I should have known better." She took a deep breath, looked him squarely in the eye, and said, "I'm here to report the theft of a diamond brooch valued at six thousand dollars, and a pair of earrings worth thirty-five hundred dollars. Will you send a man to investigate tonight, or should I ask my father to get in touch with your superior officer?"

"Your father? What's he got to—" "

"My father is a retired Surrogate's Court judge," Adele said.

"I see."

"Yes, I hope you do."

"What time did you say these ghosts arrive?" Meyer asked, and sighed heavily.

Between midnight and 2:00 the city does not change very much. The theaters have all let out, and the average Saturday night revelers, good citizens from Bethtown or Calm's Point, Riverhead or Majesta, have come into the Isola streets again in search of a snack or a giggle before heading home. The city is an ants' nest of after-theater eateries ranging from chic French cafés to pizzerias to luncheonettes to coffee shops to hot-dog stands to delicatessens, all of them packed to the ceilings because Saturday night is not only the loneliest night of the week, it is also the night to howl. And howl they do, these good burghers who have put in five long hard days of labor and who are anxious now to relax and enjoy themselves before Sunday arrives, bringing with it the attendant boredom of too much leisure, anathema for the American male.

The crowds shove and jostle their way along The Stem, moving in and out of bowling alleys, shooting galleries, penny arcades, strip joints, night clubs, jazz emporiums, souvenir shops, lining the sidewalks outside plate-glass windows in which go-go girls gyrate, or watching with fascination as a roast beef slowly turns

on a spit. Saturday night is a time for pleasure for the good people of Isola and environs, with nothing more on their minds than a little enjoyment of the short respite between Friday night at 5:00 and Monday morning at 9:00.

But along around 2:00 A.M., the city begins to change.

The good citizens have waited to get their cars out of parking garages (more garages than there are barber shops) or have staggered their way sleepily into subways to make the long trip back to the outlying sections, the furry toy dog won in the Pokerino palace clutched limply, the laughter a bit thin, the voice a bit croaked, a college song being sung on a rattling subway car, but without much force or spirit. Saturday night has ended, it is really Sunday morning already, and the morning hours are truly upon the city—and now the denizens appear.

The predators approach, with the attendant danger of the good citizens getting mugged and rolled. The junkies are out in force, looking for cars foolishly left unlocked and parked on the streets, or—lacking such fortuitous circumstance—experienced enough to force the side vent with a screwdriver, hook the lock button with a wire hanger, and open the door that way. There are pushers peddling their dream stuff, from pot to speed to hoss, a nickel bag or a twenty-dollar deck; fences hawking their stolen goodies, anything from a transistor radio to a refrigerator, the biggest bargain basement in town; burglars jimmying windows or forcing doors with a celluloid strip, this being an excellent hour to break into apartments, when the occupants are asleep and the street sounds are hushed.

But worse than any of these are the predators who roam the night in search of trouble. In cruising wedges of three or four, sometimes high but more often not, they look for victims—a taxicab driver coming out of a cafeteria, an old woman poking around garbage cans for hidden treasures, a teenage couple necking in a parked automobile—it doesn't matter. You can get killed in this city at any time of the day or night, but your chances for extinction are best after 2:00 A.M. because, paradoxically the night people take over in the morning. There are neighborhoods that terrify even cops in this lunar landscape, and there are certain places the cops will not enter unless they have first checked to see that there are two doors, one to get in by, and the other to get out through, fast, should someone decide to block the exit from behind.

The Painted Parasol was just such an establishment.

They had found in Mercy Howell's appointment book a notation that, read: *Harry, 2:00 a.m. The Painted Parasol;* and since they knew this particular joint for exactly the kind of hole it was, and since they wondered what connection the slain girl might have had with the various unappetizing types who frequented the place from dusk till dawn, they decided to hit it and find out. The front entrance opened on a long flight of stairs that led down to the main room of what was not a restaurant, and not a club, though it combined features of both. It did not possess a liquor license, and so it served only coffee and sandwiches; but occasionally a rock singer would plug in his amplifier and guitar and whack out a few numbers for the patrons. The back door of the—hangout?—opened onto a sidestreet alley. Hawes checked it out, reported back to Carella, and they both made a mental floor plan just in case they needed it later.

Carella went down the long flight of steps first, Hawes immediately behind him. At the bottom of the stairway they moved through a beaded curtain and found themselves in a large room overhung with an old Air Force parachute painted in a wild psychedelic pattern. A counter on which rested a coffee urn and trays of sandwiches in Saran Wrap was just opposite the hanging beaded curtain. To the left and right of the counter were perhaps two dozen tables, all of them occupied. A waitress in a black leotard and black high-heeled patent-leather pumps was swiveling between and around the tables, taking orders.

There was a buzz of conversation in the room, hovering, captured in the folds of the brightly painted parachute. Behind the counter a man in a white apron was drawing a cup of coffee from the huge silver urn. Carella and Hawes walked over to him. Carella was almost six feet tall, and he weighed 180 pounds, with wide shoulders and a narrow waist and the hands of a street brawler. Hawes was six feet two inches tall, and he weighed 195 pounds bone-dry, and his hair was a fiery red with a white streak over the left temple where he had once been knifed while investigating a burglary. Both men looked like exactly what they were—fuzz.

"What's the trouble?" the man behind the counter asked.

"No trouble," Carella said. "This your place?"

"Yeah. My name is Georgie Bright, and I already been visited, thanks. Twice."

"Oh? Who visited you?"

"First time a cop named O'Brien, second time a cop named Parker. I already cleared up that whole thing that was going on downstairs."

"What whole thing going on downstairs?"

"In the Men's Room. Some kids were selling pot down there, it got to be a regular neighborhood supermarket. So I done what O'Brien suggested, I put a man down there outside the toilet door, and the rule now is only one person goes in there at a time. Parker came around to make sure I was keeping my part of the bargain. I don't want no narcotics trouble here. Go down and take a look if you like. You'll see I got a man watching the toilet."

"Who's watching the man watching the toilet?" Carella asked.

"That ain't funny," Georgie Bright said, looking offended.

"Know anybody named Harry?" Hawes asked.

"Harry who? I know a lot of Harrys."

"Any of them here tonight?"

"Maybe."

"Where?"

"There's one over there near the bandstand. The big guy with the light hair."

"Harry what?"

"Donatello."

"Make the name?" Carella asked Hawes.

"No," Hawes said.

"Neither do I."

"Let's talk to him."

"You want a cup of coffee or something?" Georgie Bright asked.

"Yeah, why don't you send some over to the table?" Hawes said, and followed Carella across the room to where Harry Donatello was sitting with another man. Donatello was wearing gray slacks, black shoes and socks, a white shirt open at the throat, and a double-breasted blue blazer. His long blondish hair was combed straight back from the forehead, revealing a sharply defined widow's peak. He was easily as big as Hawes, and he sat with his hands folded on the table in front of him, talking to the man who sat opposite him. He did not look up as the detectives approached.

"Is your name Harry Donatello?" Carella asked.

"Who wants to know?"

"Police officers," Carella said, and flashed his shield.

"I'm Harry Donatello. What's the matter?"

"Mind if we sit down?" Hawes asked, and before Donatello could answer, both men sat, their backs to the empty bandstand and the exit door.

"Do you know a girl named Mercy Howell?" Carella asked.

"What about her?"

"Do you know her?"

"I know her. What's the beef? She underage or something?"

"When did you see her last?"

The man with Donatello, who up to now had been silent, suddenly piped, "You don't have to answer no questions without a lawyer, Harry. Tell them you want a lawyer."

The detectives looked him over. He was small and thin, with black hair combed sideways to conceal a receding hairline. He was badly in need of a shave. He was wearing blue trousers and a striped shirt.

"This is a field investigation," Hawes said dryly, "and we can ask anything we damn please."

"Town's getting full of lawyers," Carella said. "What's your name, counselor?"

"Jerry Riggs. You going to drag me in this, whatever it is?"

"It's a few friendly questions in the middle of the night," Hawes said. "Anybody got any objections to that?"

"Getting so two guys can't even sit and talk together without getting shook down," Riggs said.

"You've got a rough life, all right," Hawes said, and the girl in the black leotard brought their coffee to the table, and then hurried off to take another order. Donatello watched her jiggling as she swiveled across the room.

"So when's the last time you saw the Howell girl?" Carella asked again.

"Wednesday night," Donatello said.

"Did you see her tonight?"

"No."

"Were you supposed to see her tonight?"

"Where'd you get that idea?"

"We're full of ideas," Hawes said.

"Yeah, I was supposed to meet her here ten minutes ago. Dumb broad is late, as usual."

"What do you do for a living, Donatello?"

"I'm an importer. You want to see my business card?"

"What do you import?"

"Souvenir ashtrays."

"How'd you get to know Mercy Howell?"

"I met her at a party in The Quarter. She got a little high, and she done her thing."

"What thing?"

"The thing she does in that show she's in."

"Which is what?"

"She done this dance where she takes off all her clothes."

"How long have you been seeing her?"

"I met her a couple of months ago. I see her on and off, maybe once a week, something like that. This town is full of broads, you know—a guy don't have to get himself involved in no relationship with no specific broad."

"What was your relationship with *this* specific broad?"

"We have a few laughs together, that's all. She's a swinger, little Mercy," Donatello said, and grinned at Riggs.

"Want to tell us where you were tonight between eleven and twelve?"

"Is this still a *field* investigation?" Riggs asked sarcastically.

"Nobody's in custody yet," Hawes said, "so let's cut the legal jazz, okay? Tell us where you were, Donatello."

"Right here," Donatello said. "From ten o'clock till now."

"I suppose somebody saw you here during that time."

"A hundred people saw me."

A crowd of angry black men and women were standing outside the shattered window of the storefront church. Two fire engines and an ambulance were parked at the curb. Kling pulled in behind the second engine, some ten feet away from the hydrant. It was almost 2:30 A.M. on a bitterly cold October night, but the crowd looked and sounded like a mob at an afternoon street-corner rally in the middle of August. Restless, noisy, abrasive, anticipative, they ignored the penetrating cold and concentrated instead on the burning issue of the hour—the fact that a person or persons unknown had thrown a bomb through the plate-glass window of the church.

The beat patrolman, a newly appointed cop who felt vaguely uneasy in this neighborhood even during his daytime shift, greeted Kling effusively, his pale white face bracketed by earmuffs, his gloved hands clinging desperately to his nightstick. The crowd parted to let Kling through. It did not help that he was

the youngest man on the squad, with the callow look of a country bumpkin on his unlined face; it did not help that he was blonde and hatless; it did not help that he walked into the church with the confident youthful stride of a champion come to set things right. The crowd knew he was fuzz, and they knew he was Whitey, and they knew, too, that if this bombing had taken place on Hall Avenue crosstown and downtown, the Police Commissioner himself would have arrived behind a herald of official trumpets.

This, however, was Culver Avenue, where a boiling mixture of Puerto Ricans and Blacks shared a disintegrating ghetto, and so the car that pulled to the curb was not marked with the Commissioner's distinctive blue-and-gold seal, but was instead a green Chevy convertible that belonged to Kling himself; and the man who stepped out of it looked young and inexperienced and inept despite the confident stride he affected as he walked into the church, his shield pinned to his overcoat.

The bomb had caused little fire damage, and the firemen already had the flames under control, their hoses snaking through and around the overturned folding chairs scattered around the small room. Ambulance attendants picked their way over the hoses and around the debris, carrying out the injured—the dead could wait.

"Have you called the Bomb Squad?" Kling asked the patrolman. "No," the patrolman answered, shaken by the sudden possibility that he had been derelict in his duty.

"Why don't you do that now?" Kling suggested.

"Yes, sir," the patrolman answered, and rushed out. The ambulance attendants went by with a moaning woman on a stretcher. She was still wearing her eyeglasses, but one lens had been shattered and blood was running in a steady rivulet down the side of her nose. The place stank of gunpowder and smoke and charred wood. The most serious damage had been done at the rear of the small store, farthest away from the entrance door. Whoever had thrown the bomb must have possessed a good pitching arm to have hurled it so accurately through the window and across the fifteen feet to the makeshift altar.

The minister lay across his own altar, dead. Two women who had been sitting on folding chairs closest to the altar lay on the floor, tangled in death, their clothes still smoldering. The sounds of the injured filled the room, and then were suffocated by the

overriding siren-shriek of the second ambulance arriving. Kling went outside to the crowd.

"Anybody here witness this?" he asked.

A young man, black, wearing a beard and a natural hair style, turned away from a group of other youths and walked directly to Kling.

"Is the minister dead?" he asked.

"Yes, he is," Kling answered.

"Who else?"

"Two women."

"Who?"

"I don't know yet. We'll identify them as soon as the men are through in there." Kling turned again to the crowd. "Did anybody see what happened?" he asked.

"I saw it," the young man said.

"What's your name, son?"

"Andrew Jordan."

Kling took out his pad. "All right, let's have it."

"What good's this going to do?" Jordan asked. "Writing all this stuff in your book?"

"You said you saw what—"

"I saw it, all right. I was walking by, heading for the pool room up the street, and the ladies were inside singing, and this car pulled up and a guy got out, threw the bomb, and ran back to the car."

"What kind of a car was it?"

"A red Volkswagen."

"What year?"

"Who can tell with those VWs?"

"How many people in it?"

"Two. The driver and the guy who threw the bomb."

"Notice the license-plate number?"

"No. They drove off too fast."

"Can you describe the man who threw the bomb?"

"Yeah. He was white."

"What else?" Kling asked.

"That's all," Jordan replied. "He was white."

There were perhaps three dozen estates in all of Smoke Rise, a hundred or so people living in luxurious near-seclusion on acres of valuable land through which ran four winding, interconnected,

private roadways. Meyer Meyer drove between the wide stone pillars marking Smoke Rise's western access road, entering a city within a city, bounded on the north by the River Harb, shielded from the River Highway by stands of poplars and evergreens on the south—exclusive Smoke Rise, known familiarly and derisively to the rest of the city's inhabitants as "The Club."

MacArthur Lane was at the end of the road that curved past the Hamilton Bridge. Number 374 was a huge graystone house with a slate roof and scores of gables and chimneys jostling the sky, perched high in gloomy shadow above the Harb. As he stepped from the car, Meyer could hear the sounds of river traffic, the hooting of tugs, the blowing of whistles, the eruption of a squawk box on a destroyer midstream. He looked out over the water. Reflected lights glistened in shimmering liquid beauty—the hanging globes on the bridge's suspension cables, the dazzling reds and greens of signal lights on the opposite shore, single illuminated window slashes in apartment buildings throwing their mirror images onto the black surface of the river, the blinking wing lights of an airplane overhead moving in watery reflection like a submarine. The air was cold, and a fine piercing drizzle had begun several minutes ago.

Meyer shuddered, pulled the collar of his coat higher on his neck, and walked toward the old gray house, his shoes crunching on the driveway gravel, the sound echoing away into the high surrounding bushes.

The stones of the old house oozed wetness. Thick vines covered the walls, climbing to the gabled, turreted roof. He found a doorbell set over a brass escutcheon in the thick oak doorjamb, and pressed it. Chimes sounded somewhere deep inside the house. He waited.

The door opened suddenly.

The man looking out at him was perhaps 70 years old, with piercing blue eyes; he was bald except for white thatches of hair that sprang wildly from behind each ear. He wore a red smoking jacket and black trousers, a black ascot around his neck, and red velvet slippers.

"What do you want?" he asked immediately.

"I'm Detective Meyer of the Eighty-seventh—"

"Who sent for you?"

"A woman named Adele Gorman came to the—"

"My daughter's a fool," the man said. "We don't need the police

here." And he slammed the door in Meyer's face.

The detective stood on the doorstep feeling somewhat like a horse's neck. A tugboat hooted on the river. A light snapped on upstairs, casting an amber rectangle into the dark driveway. He looked at the luminous dial of his watch. It was 2:35 A.M. The drizzle was cold and penetrating. He took out his handkerchief, blew his nose, and wondered what he should do next. He did not like ghosts, and he did not like lunatics, and he did not like nasty old men who did not comb their hair and who slammed doors in a person's face. He was about to head back for his car when the door opened again.

"Detective Meyer?" Adele Gorman said. "Do come in."

"Thank you," he said, and stepped into the entrance foyer.

"You're right on time."

"Well, a little early actually," Meyer said. He still felt foolish. What the hell was he doing in Smoke Rise investigating ghosts in the middle of the night?

"This way," Adele said, and he followed her through a somberly paneled foyer into a vast dimly lighted living room. Heavy oak beams ran overhead, velvet draperies hung at the window, the room was cluttered with ponderous old furniture. He could believe there were ghosts in this house, he could believe it.

A young man wearing dark glasses rose like a specter from the sofa near the fireplace. His face, illuminated by the single standing floor lamp, looked wan and drawn. Wearing a black cardigan sweater over a white shirt and dark slacks, he approached Meyer unsmilingly with his hand extended—but he did not accept Meyer's hand when it was offered in return.

Meyer suddenly realized that the man was blind.

"I'm Ralph Gorman," he said, his hand still extended. "Adele's husband."

"How do you do, Mr. Gorman," Meyer said, and took his hand. The palm was moist and cold.

"It was good of you to come," Gorman said. "These apparitions have been driving us crazy."

"What time is it?" Adele asked suddenly, and looked at her watch. "We've got five minutes," she said. There was a tremor in her voice. She looked suddenly very frightened.

"Won't your father be here?" Meyer asked.

"No, he's gone up to bed," Adele said. "I'm afraid he's bored with the whole affair, and terribly angry that we notified you."

Meyer made no comment. Had he known that Willem Van Houten, former Surrogate's Court judge, had not wanted the police to be notified, Meyer would not have been here either. He debated leaving now, but Adele Gorman had begun to talk again.

"...is in her early thirties, I would guess. The other ghost, the male, is about your age—forty or forty-five, something like that."

"I'm thirty-seven," Meyer said.

"Oh."

"The bald head fools a lot of people."

"Yes."

"I was bald at a very early age."

"Anyway," Adele said, "their names are Elisabeth and Johann, and they've probably been—"

"Oh, they have names, do they?"

"Yes. They're ancestors, you know. My father is Dutch, and there actually were an Elisabeth and Johann Van Houten in the family centuries ago, when Smoke Rise was still a Dutch settlement."

"They're Dutch. Um-huh, I see," Meyer said.

"Yes. They always appear wearing Dutch costumes. And they also speak Dutch."

"Have you heard them, Mr. Gorman?"

"Yes," Gorman said. "I'm blind, you know—" he added, and hesitated, as though expecting some comment from Meyer. When none came, he said, "But I have heard them."

"Do you speak Dutch?"

"No. My father-in-law speaks it fluently, though, and he identified the language for us, and told us what they were saying."

"What did they say?"

"Well, for one thing, they said they were going to steal Adele's jewelry, and they did just that."

"Your wife's jewelry? But I thought—"

"It was willed to her by her mother. My father-in-law keeps it in his safe."

"Kept, you mean."

"No, keeps. There are several pieces in addition to the ones that were stolen. Two rings and also a necklace."

"And the value?"

"Altogether? I would say about forty thousand dollars."

"Your ghosts have expensive taste."

The floor lamp in the room suddenly began to flicker. Meyer

glanced at it and felt the hackles rising at the back of his neck.

"The lights are going out, Ralph," Adele whispered.

"Is it two forty-five?"

"Yes."

"They're here," Gorman whispered. "The ghosts are here."

Mercy Howell's roommate had been asleep for nearly four hours when they knocked on her door. But she was a wily young lady, hip to the ways of the big city, and very much awake as she conducted her own little investigation without so much as opening the door a crack. First she asked them to spell their names slowly. Then she asked them their shield numbers. Then she asked them to hold their shields and I.D. cards close to the door's peephole, where she could see them. Still unconvinced, she said through the locked door, "You just wait there a minute."

They waited for closer to five minutes before they heard her approaching the door again. The heavy steel bar of a Fox lock was lowered noisily to the floor, a safety chain rattled on its track, the tumblers of one lock clicked open, and then another, and finally the girl opened the door.

"Come in," she said, "I'm sorry I kept you waiting. I called the station house and they said you were okay."

"You're a very careful girl," Hawes said.

"At this hour of the morning? Are you kidding?" she said.

She was perhaps 25, with her red hair up in curlers, her face cold-creamed clean of makeup. She was wearing a pink quilted robe over flannel pajamas, and although she was probably a very pretty girl at 9:00 A.M., she now looked about as attractive as a Buffalo nickel.

"What's your name, Miss?" Carella asked.

"Lois Kaplan. What's this all about? Has there been another burglary in the building?"

"No, Miss Kaplan. We want to ask you some questions about Mercy Howell. Did she live here with you?"

"Yes," Lois said, and suddenly looked at them shrewdly. "What do you mean *did*? She still *does*."

They were standing in the small foyer of the apartment, and the foyer went so still that all the night sounds of the building were clearly audible all at once, as though they had not been there before but had only been summoned up now to fill the void of silence. A toilet flushed somewhere, a hot-water pipe rattled, a

baby whimpered, a dog barked, someone dropped a shoe. In the foyer, now filled with noise, they stared at each other wordlessly, and finally Carella drew a deep breath and said, "Your roommate is dead. She was stabbed tonight as she was leaving the theater."

"No," Lois said, simply and flatly. "No, she isn't."

"Miss Kaplan—"

"I don't give a damn what you say, Mercy isn't dead."

"Miss Kaplan, she's dead."

"Oh, God," Lois said, and burst into tears.

The two men stood by feeling stupid and big and awkward and helpless. Lois Kaplan covered her face with her hands and sobbed into them, her shoulders heaving, saying over and over again, "I'm sorry, oh, God, please, I'm sorry, please, oh poor Mercy, oh my God," while the detectives tried not to watch.

At last the crying stopped and she looked up at them with eyes that had been knifed, and said softly, "Come in. Please," and led them into the living room. She kept staring at the floor as she talked. It was as if she could not look them in the face, not these men who had brought her the dreadful news.

"Do you know who did it?" she asked.

"No. Not yet."

"We wouldn't have wakened you in the middle of the night if—"

"That's all right."

"But very often, if we get moving on a case fast enough, before the trail gets cold—"

"Yes, I understand."

"We can often—"

"Yes, before the trail gets cold," Lois said.

"Yes."

The apartment went silent again.

"Would you know if Miss Howell had any enemies?" Carella asked.

"She was the sweetest girl in the world," Lois said.

"Did she argue with anyone recently? Were there any—"

"No."

"—any threatening telephone calls or letters?"

Lois Kaplan looked up at them. "Yes," she said. "A letter."

"A threatening letter?"

"We couldn't tell. It frightened Mercy, though. That's why she bought the gun."

"What kind of gun?"

"I don't know. A small one."

"Would it have been a .25 caliber Browning?"

"I don't know guns."

"Was this letter mailed to her, or delivered personally?"

"It was mailed to her. At the theater."

"When?"

"A week ago."

"Did she report it to the police?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Haven't you seen *Rattlesnake?*" Lois said.

"What do you mean?" Carella asked.

"*Rattlesnake*. The musical. The show Mercy was in."

"No, I haven't."

"But you've heard of it."

"No."

"Where do you live, for God's sake? On the moon?"

"I'm sorry, I just haven't—"

"Forgive me," Lois said immediately. "I'm not usually—I'm trying very hard to—I'm sorry. Forgive me."

"That's all right," Carella said.

"Anyway, it's a big hit now but—well, there was trouble in the beginning, you see. Are you *sure* you don't know about this? It was in all the newspapers."

"I guess I missed it," Carella said. "What was the trouble about?"

"Don't you know about this either?" she asked Hawes.

"No, I'm sorry."

"About Mercy's dance?"

"No."

"Well, in one scene Mercy danced the title song without any clothes on. Because the idea was to express—the hell with what the idea was. The point is that the dance wasn't at all obscene, it wasn't even sexy! But the police *missed* the point, and closed the show down two days after it opened. The producers had to go to court for a writ or something to get the show opened again."

"Yes, I remember it now," Carella said.

"What I'm trying to say is that nobody involved with *Rattlesnake* would report *anything* to the police. Not even a threatening letter."

"If she bought a pistol," Hawes said, "she would have *had* to go to the police. For a permit."

"She didn't have a permit."

"Then how'd she get the pistol? You can't buy a handgun without first—"

"A friend of hers sold it to her."

"What's the friend's name?"

"Harry Donatello."

"An importer," Carella said.

"Of souvenir ashtrays," Hawes said.

"I don't know what he does for a living," Lois said, "but he got the gun for her."

"When was this?"

"A few days after she received the letter."

"What did the letter say?" Carella asked.

"I'll get it for you," Lois said, and went into the bedroom. They heard a dresser drawer opening, the rustle of clothes, what might have been a tin candy box being opened. Lois came back into the room. "Here it is," she said.

There didn't seem much point in trying to preserve latent prints on a letter that had already been handled by Mercy Howell, Lois Kaplan, and the Lord knew how many others. But nonetheless Carella accepted the letter on a handkerchief spread over the palm of his hand, and then looked at the face of the envelope. "She should have brought this to us. It's written on hotel stationery, we've got an address without lifting a finger."

The letter had indeed been written on stationery from The Addison Hotel, one of the city's lesser-known fleabags, some two blocks north of the Eleventh Street Theater, where Mercy Howell had worked. There was a single sheet of paper in the envelope. Carella unfolded it. Lettered on the paper in pencil were the words:

PUT ON YOUR
CLOSE, Miss!

The Avenging Angel.

The lamp went out, the room was black..

At first there was no sound but the sharp intake of Adele Gorman's breath. And then, indistinctly, as faintly as though carried on a swirling mist that blew in wetly from some desolated shore, there came the sound of garbled voices, and the room grew suddenly cold. The voices were those of a crowd in endless debate, rising and falling in cacophonous cadence, a mixture of tongues that rattled and rasped. There was the sound, too, of a rising wind, as though a door to some forbidden landscape had been sharply and suddenly blown open to reveal a host of corpses incessantly pacing, involved in formless dialogue.

The voices rose in volume now, carried on that same chill penetrating wind, louder, closer, until they seemed to overwhelm the room, clamoring to be released from whatever unearthly vault contained them. And then, as if two of those disembodied voices had succeeded in breaking away from the mass of unseen dead, bringing with them a rush of bone-chilling air from some world unknown, there came a whisper at first, the whisper of a man's voice, saying the single word "Ralph!"—sharp-edged and with a distinctive foreign inflection.

"Ralph!"—and then a woman's voice joining it saying, "Adele!"—pronounced strangely and in the same cutting whisper.

"Adele!"—and then "Ralph!" again, the voices overlapping, unmistakably foreign, urgent, rising in volume until the whispers commingled to become an agonizing groan—and then the names were lost in the shrilling echo of the wind.

Meyer's eyes played tricks in the darkness. Apparitions that surely were not there seemed to float on the crescendo of sound that saturated the room. Barely perceived pieces of furniture assumed amorphous shapes as the male voice snarled and the female voice moaned above it.

And then the babel of other voices intruded again, as though calling these two back to whatever grim mossy crypt they had momentarily escaped. The sound of the wind became more fierce, and the voices receded, and echoed, and were gone.

The lamp sputtered back into dim illumination. The room seemed perceptibly warmer, but Meyer Meyer was covered with a cold clammy sweat.

"Now do you believe?" Adele Gorman asked.

Detective Bob O'Brien was coming out of the Men's Room down the hall when he saw the woman sitting on the bench just outside.

the squadroom. He almost went back into the toilet, but he was an instant too late; she had seen him, so there was no escape.

"Hello, Mr. O'Brien," she said, and performed an awkward little half-rising motion, as though uncertain whether she should stand to greet him or accept the deference due a lady. The clock on the squadroom wall read 3:02 A.M. but the lady was dressed as though for a brisk afternoon's hike in the park—brown slacks, low-heeled walking shoes, beige car coat, a scarf around her head. She was perhaps 55, with a face that once must have been pretty, save for the overlong nose. Greeneyed, with prominent cheekbones and a generous mouth, she executed her abortive rise, then fell into step beside O'Brien as he walked into the squadroom.

"Little late in the night to be out, isn't it, Mrs. Blair?" O'Brien asked. He was not an insensitive cop, but his manner now was brusque and dismissive. Faced with Mrs. Blair for perhaps the seventeenth time in a month, he tried not to empathize with her loss because, truthfully, he was unable to assist her, and his inability to do so was frustrating.

"Have you seen her?" Mrs. Blair asked.

"No," O'Brien said. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Blair, but I haven't."

"I have a new picture—perhaps that will help."

"Yes, perhaps it will," he said.

The telephone was ringing. He lifted the receiver and said, "Eighty-seventh, O'Brien here."

"Bob, this's Bert Kling over on Culver—the church bombing."

"Yeah, Bert."

"Seems I remember seeing a red Volkswagen on that hot-car bulletin we got yesterday. You want to dig it out and let me know where it was snatched?"

"Yeah, just a second," O'Brien said, and began scanning the sheet on his desk.

"Here's the new picture," Mrs. Blair said. "I know you're very good with runaways, Mr. O'Brien—the kids all like you and give you information. If you see Penelope, all I want you to do is tell her I love her and am sorry for the misunderstanding."

"Yeah, I will," O'Brien said. Into the phone he said, "I've got two red VWs, Bert, a sixty-four and a sixty-six. You want both?"

"Shoot," Kling said.

"The sixty-four was stolen from a guy named Art Hauser. It was parked outside eight-six-one West Meridian."

"And the sixty-six?"

"Owner is a woman named Alice Cleary. Car was stolen from a parking lot on Fourteenth."

"North or South?"

"South. Three-o-three South."

"Right. Thanks, Bob," Kling said, and hung up.

"And ask her to come home to me," Mrs. Blair said.

"Yes, I will," O'Brien said. "If I see her, I certainly will."

"That's a nice picture of Penny, don't you think?" Mrs. Blair asked. "It was taken last Easter. It's the most recent picture I have. I thought it would be helpful to you."

O'Brien looked at the girl in the picture, and then looked up into Mrs. Blair's green eyes, misted now with tears, and suddenly wanted to reach across the desk and pat her hand reassuringly, the one thing he could not do with any honesty. Because whereas it was true that he was the squad's runaway expert, with perhaps 50 snapshots of teenagers crammed into his bulging notebook, and whereas his record of finds was more impressive than any other cop's in the city, uniformed or plainclothes, there wasn't a damn thing he could do for the mother of Penelope Blair, who had run away from home last June.

"You understand—" he started to say.

"Let's not go into that again, Mr. O'Brien," she said, and rose.

"Mrs. Blair—"

"I don't want to hear it," Mrs. Blair said, walking quickly out of the squadroom. "Tell her to come home. Tell her I love her," she said, and was gone down the iron-runged steps.

O'Brien sighed and stuffed the new picture of Penelope into his notebook. What Mrs. Blair did not choose to hear again was the fact that her runaway daughter Penny was 24 years old, and there was not a single agency on God's green earth, police or otherwise, that could force her to go home again if she did not choose to.

Fats Donner was a stool pigeon with a penchant for Turkish baths. A mountainous white Buddha of a man, he could usually be found at one of the city's steam emporiums at any given hour of the day, draped in a towel and reveling in the heat that saturated his flabby body. Bert Kling found him in an all-night place called Steam-Fit.

Kling sent the masseur into the steam room to tell Donner he was there, and Donner sent word out that he would be through in

five minutes, unless Kling wished to join him. Kling did not wish to join him. He waited in the locker room, and in seven minutes' time, Donner came out, draped in his customary towel, a ludicrous sight at any time, but particularly at 3:30 A.M.

"Hey!" Donner said. "How you doing?"

"Fine," Kling said. "How about yourself?"

"Comme-ci, comme-ca," Donner said, and made a seesawing motion with one fleshy hand.

"I'm looking for some stolen heaps," Kling said, getting directly to the point.

"What kind?" Donner said.

"Volkswagens. A sixty-four and a sixty-six."

"What color?"

"Red."

"Both of them?"

"Yes."

"Where were they heisted?"

"One from in front of eight-six-one West Meridian. The other from a parking lot on South Fourteenth."

"When was this?"

"Both last week sometime. I don't have the exact dates."

"What do you want to know?"

"Who stole them."

"You think it's the same guy on both?"

"I don't know."

"What's so important about these heaps?"

"One of them may have been used in a bombing tonight."

"You mean the church over on Culver?"

"That's right."

"Count me out," Donner said.

"What do you mean?"

"There's a lot of guys in this town who're in *sympathy* with what happened over there tonight. I don't want to get involved."

"Who's going to know whether you're involved or not?" Kling asked.

"The same way *you* get information, they get information."

"I need your help, Donner."

"Yeah, well, I'm sorry on this one," Donner said, and shook his head.

"In that case I'd better hurry downtown to High Street."

"Why? You got another source down there?"

"No, that's where the D.A.'s office is."

Both men stared at each other—Donner in a white towel draped around his belly, sweat still pouring from his face and his chest even though he was no longer in the steam room, and Kling looking like a slightly tired advertising executive rather than a cop threatening a man with revelation of past deeds not entirely legal. They stared at each other with total understanding, caught in the curious symbiosis of law breaker and law enforcer, an empathy created by neither man, but essential to the existence of both. It was Donner who broke the silence.

"I don't like being coerced," he said.

"I don't like being refused," Kling answered.

"When do you need this?"

"I want to get going on it before morning."

"You expect miracles, don't you?"

"Doesn't everybody?"

"Miracles cost."

"How much?"

"Twenty-five if I turn up one heap, fifty if I turn up both."

"Turn them up first. We'll talk later."

"And if somebody breaks my head later?"

"You should have thought of that before you entered the profession," Kling said. "Come on, Donner, cut it out. This is a routine bombing by a couple of punks. You've got nothing to be afraid of."

"No?" Donner asked. And then, in a very professorial voice, he uttered perhaps the biggest understatement of the decade. "Racial tensions are running high in this city right now."

"Have you got my number at the squadroom?"

"Yeah, I've got it," Donner said glumly.

"I'm going back there now. Let me hear from you soon."

"You mind if I get dressed first?" Donner asked.

The night clerk at The Addison Hotel was alone in the lobby when Carella and Hawes walked in. Immersed in an open book on the desk in front of him, he did not look up as they approached. The lobby was furnished in faded Victorian: a threadbare Oriental rug, heavy curlicued mahogany tables, ponderous stuffed chairs with sagging bottoms and soiled antimacassars, two spittoons resting alongside each of two mahogany paneled supporting columns. A genuine Tiffany lampshade hung over the registration desk, one leaded glass panel gone, another badly cracked. In the

old days The Addison had been a luxury hotel. It now wore its past splendor with all the style of a dance-hall girl in a moth-eaten mink she'd picked up in a thrift shop.

The clerk, in contrast to his antique surroundings, was a young man in his mid-twenties, wearing a neatly pressed brown tweed suit, a tan shirt, a gold and brown rep tie, and eyeglasses with tortoise-shell rims. He glanced up at the detectives belatedly, squinting after the intense concentration of peering at print, and then he got to his feet.

"Yes, gentlemen," he said. "May I help you?"

"Police officers," Carella said. He took his wallet from his pocket, and opened it to where his detective's shield was pinned to a leather flap.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm Detective Carella, this is my partner, Detective Hawes."

"How do you do? I'm the night clerk—my name is Ronald Sanford."

"We're looking for someone who may have been registered here two weeks ago," Hawes said.

"Well, if he was registered here two weeks ago," Sanford said, "chances are he's still registered. Most of our guests are residents."

"Do you keep stationery in the lobby here?" Carella asked.

"Sir?"

"Stationery. Is there any place here in the lobby where someone could walk in off the street and pick up a piece of stationery?"

"No, sir. There's a writing desk there in the corner, near the staircase, but we don't stock it with stationery, no, sir."

"Is there stationery in the rooms?"

"Yes, sir."

"How about here at the desk?"

"Yes, of course, sir."

"Is there someone at this desk twenty-four hours a day?"

"Twenty-four hours a day, yes, sir. We have three shifts. Eight to four in the afternoon. Four to midnight. And midnight to eight A.M."

"You came on at midnight, did you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any guests come in after you started your shift?"

"A few, yes, sir."

"Notice anybody with blood on his clothes?"

"Blood? Oh, no, sir."

"Would you have noticed?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you pretty aware of what's going on around here?"

"I try to be, sir. At least, for most of the night. I catch a little nap when I'm not studying, but usually—"

"What do you study?"

"Accounting."

"Where?"

"At Ramsey U."

"Mind if we take a look at your register?"

"Not at all, sir."

He walked to the mail rack and took the hotel register from the counter there. Returning to the desk he opened it and said, "All of our present guests are residents, with the exception of Mr. Lambert in two hundred and four, and Mrs. Grant in seven hundred and one."

"When did they check in?"

"Mr. Lambert checked in—last night, I think it was. And Mrs. Grant has been here four days. She's leaving on Tuesday."

"Are these the actual signatures of your guests?"

"Yes, sir. All guests are asked to sign the register, as required by state law."

"Have you got that note, Cotton?" Carella asked, and then turned again to Sanford. "Would you mind if we took this over to the couch there?"

"Well, we're not supposed—"

"We can give you a receipt for it, if you like."

"No, I guess it'll be all right."

They carried the register to a couch upholstered in faded red velvet. With the book supported on Carella's lap they unfolded the note that Mercy Howell had received, and began to compare the signatures of the guests with the only part of the note that was not written in block letters—the words, *The Avenging Angel*.

There were 52 guests in the hotel. Carella and Hawes went through the register once, and then started through it again.

"Hey," Hawes said suddenly.

"What?"

"Look at this one."

He took the note and placed it on the page so that it was directly above one of the signatures:

PUT ON YOUR
CLOSE, Miss!

The Avenging Angel.

Timothy Allen Hawes

"What do you think?" he asked.
"Different handwriting," Carella said.
"Same initials," Hawes said.

Detective Meyer Meyer was still shaken. He did not like ghosts. He did not like this house. He wanted to go home to his wife Sarah. He wanted her to stroke his hand and tell him that such things did not exist. How could he believe in poltergeists, shades, Dutch spirits? Ridiculous!

But he had heard them, and he had felt their chilling presence, and had almost thought he'd seen them, if only for an instant. He turned with fresh shock now toward the hall staircase and the sound of descending footsteps. Eyes wide, he waited for whatever new manifestation might present itself. He was tempted to draw his revolver, but he was afraid such an act would appear foolish to the Gormans. He had come here a skeptic, and he was now at least willing to believe, and he waited in dread for whatever was coming down those steps with such ponderous footfalls —some ghoul trailing winding sheets and rattling chains? Some specter with a bleached skull for a head and long bony fingers?

Willem Van Houten, wearing his red velvet slippers and his red smoking jacket, his hair still jutting wildly from behind each ear, his blue eyes fierce, came into the living room and walked directly to where his daughter and son-in-law were sitting.

"Well?" he asked. "Did they come again?"

"Yes, Daddy," Adele said.

"What did they want this time?"

"I don't know. They spoke Dutch again."

Van Houten turned to Meyer. "Did you see them?" he asked.

"No, sir, I did not," Meyer said.

"But they were *here*," Gorman protested, and turned his blank face to his wife. "I heard them."

"Yes, darling," Adele assured him. "We *all* heard them. But it was like that other time, don't you remember? When we could hear them even though they couldn't quite break through."

"Yes, that's right," Gorman said, and nodded. "This happened once before, Detective Meyer." He was facing Meyer now, his head tilted quizzically, the sightless eyes covered with their black glasses. When he spoke his voice was like that of a child seeking reassurance. "But you *did* hear them, didn't you, Detective Meyer?"

"Yes," Meyer said. "I heard them, Mr. Gorman."

"And the wind?"

"Yes, the wind, too."

"And felt them. It—it gets so cold when they appear. You did feel their presence, didn't you?"

"I felt something," Meyer said.

Van Houten suddenly asked, "Are you satisfied?"

"About what?" Meyer said.

"That there are ghosts in this house? That's why you're here, isn't it? To ascertain—"

"He's here because I asked Adele to notify the police," Gorman said.

"Why did you do that?"

"Because of the stolen jewelry," Gorman said. "And because—" He paused. "Because I've lost my sight, yes, but I wanted to—to make sure I wasn't losing my mind as well."

"You're perfectly sane, Ralph," Van Houten said.

"About the jewelry—" Meyer said.

"They took it," Van Houten said.

"Who?"

"Johann and Elisabeth. Our friendly neighborhood ghosts."

"That's impossible, Mr. Van Houten."

"Why is it impossible?"

"Because ghosts—" Meyer started, and hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Ghosts—well, ghosts don't go around stealing jewelry. I mean, what use would they have for it?" he said lamely, and looked at the Gormans for corroboration. Neither of the Gormans seemed to be in a substantiating mood. They sat on the sofa near the fireplace, both looking glum.

"They want us out of this house," Van Houten said. "It's as simple as that."

"How do you know?"

"Because they said so."

"When?"

"Before they stole the necklace and the earrings."

"They told this to you?"

"To me and to my children. All three of us were here."

"But I understand the ghosts speak only Dutch."

"Yes, I translated for Ralph and Adele."

"And then what happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"When did you discover the jewelry was missing?"

"The instant they were gone."

"You mean you went to the safe?"

"Yes, and opened it, and the jewelry was gone."

"We had put it in the safe not ten minutes before that," Adele said. "We'd been to a party, Ralph and I, and we got home very late, and Daddy was still awake, reading, sitting in that chair you're in this very minute. I asked him to open the safe, and he did; and he put the jewelry in and closed the safe and . . . and then *they* came and . . . and made their threats."

"What time was this?"

"The usual time. The time they always come: Two forty-five in the morning."

"And you say the jewelry was put into the safe at what time?"

"About two thirty," Gorman said.

"And when was the safe opened again?"

"Immediately after they left. They only stay a few moments. This time they told my father-in-law they were taking the necklace and the earrings with them. He rushed to the safe as soon as the lights came on again—"

"Do the lights always go off?"

"Always," Adele said. "It's always the same. The lights go off, and the room gets very cold, and we hear these strange voices arguing." She paused. "And then Johann and Elisabeth come."

"Except that this time they didn't come," Meyer said.

"And one other time," Adele said quickly.

"They want us out of this house," Van Houten said, "that's all there is to it. Maybe we ought to leave. Before they take everything from us."

"Everything? What do you mean?"

"The rest of my daughter's jewelry. And some stock certificates. Everything that's in the safe."

"Where is the safe?" Meyer asked.

"Here. Behind this painting." Van Houten walked to the wall opposite the fireplace. An oil painting of a pastoral landscape hung there in an ornate gilt frame. The frame was hinged to the wall. Van Houten swung the painting out as though opening a door, and revealed the small, round, black safe behind it. "Here."

"How many people know the combination?" Meyer asked.

"Just me," Van Houten said.

"Do you keep the number written down anywhere?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Hidden."

"Where?"

"I hardly think that's any of your business, Detective Meyer."

"I'm only trying to find out whether some other person could have got hold of the combination somehow."

"Yes, I suppose that's possible," Van Houten said. "But highly unlikely."

"Well," Meyer said, and shrugged. "I don't really know what to say. I'd like to measure the room, if you don't mind, get the dimensions, placement of doors and windows, things like that. For my report." He shrugged again.

"It's rather late, isn't it?" Van Houten said.

"Well, I got here rather late," Meyer said, and smiled.

"Come, Daddy, I'll make us all some tea in the kitchen," Adele said. "Will you be long, Detective Meyer?"

"It may take a while."

"Shall I bring you some tea?"

"Thank you, that would be nice."

She rose from the couch and then guided her husband's hand to her arm. Walking slowly beside him, she led him past her father and out of the room. Van Houten looked at Meyer once again, nodded briefly, and followed them out. Meyer closed the door behind them and immediately walked to the standing floor lamp.

The woman was 60 years old, and she looked like anybody's grandmother, except that she had just murdered her husband and three children. They had explained her rights to her, and she had

told them she had nothing to hide and would answer any questions they asked her. She sat in a straight-backed squadroom chair, wearing a black cloth coat over blood-stained nightgown and robe, her handcuffed hands in her lap, her hands unmoving on her black leather pocketbook.

O'Brien and Kling looked at the police stenographer, who glanced up at the wall clock, noted the time of the interrogation's start as 3:55 A.M., and then signaled that he was ready whenever they were.

"What is your name?" O'Brien asked.

"Isabel Martin."

"How old are you, Mrs. Martin?"

"Sixty."

"Where do you live?"

"On Ainsley Avenue."

"Where on Ainsley?"

"Six hundred fifty-seven Ainsley."

"With whom do you live there?"

"With my husband Roger, and my son Peter, and my daughters Anne and Abigail."

"Would you like to tell us what happened tonight, Mrs. Martin?" Kling asked.

"I killed them all," she said. She had white hair, a fine aquiline nose, brown eyes behind rimless spectacles. She stared straight ahead of her as she spoke, looking neither to her right nor to her left, seemingly alone with the memory of what she had done not a half hour before.

"Can you give us some of the details, Mrs. Martin?"

"I killed *him* first."

"Who do you mean, Mrs. Martin?"

"My husband."

"When was this?"

"When he came home."

"What time was that, do you remember?"

"A little while ago."

"It's almost four o'clock now," Kling said. "Would you say this was at, what, three thirty or thereabouts?"

"I didn't look at the clock," she said. "I heard his key in the door, and I went in the kitchen, and there he was."

"Yes?"

"There's a meat cleaver I keep on the sink. I hit him with it."

"Why did you do that, Mrs. Martin?"

"Because I wanted to."

"Were you arguing with him, is that it?"

"No. I just went over to the sink and picked up the cleaver, and then I hit him with it."

"Where did you hit him, Mrs. Martin?"

"On his head and on his neck and I think on his shoulder."

"You hit him three times with the cleaver?"

"I hit him a lot of times. I don't know how many."

"Were you aware that you were hitting him?"

"Yes, I was aware."

"You knew you were striking him with a cleaver."

"Yes, I knew."

"Did you intend to kill him with the cleaver?"

"I intended to kill him with the cleaver."

"And afterwards, did you know you had killed him?"

"I knew he was dead, yes."

"What did you do then?"

"My oldest child came into the kitchen. Peter. My son. He yelled at me, he wanted to know what I'd done, he kept yelling at me and yelling at me. I hit him, too—to get him to shut up. I hit him only once, across the throat."

"Did you know what you were doing at the time?"

"I knew what I was doing. He was *another* one, that Peter."

"What happened next, Mrs. Martin?"

"I went in the back bedroom where the two girls sleep, and I hit Annie with the cleaver first, and then I hit Abigail."

"Where did you hit them, Mrs. Martin?"

"On the face. Their faces."

"How many times?"

"I think I hit Annie twice, and Abigail only once."

"Why did you do that, Mrs. Martin?"

"Who would take care of them after I was gone?" Mrs. Martin asked of no one.

There was a long pause, then Kling asked, "Is there anything else you want to tell us?"

"There's nothing more to tell. I done the right thing."

The detectives walked away from the desk. They were both pale. "Man," O'Brien whispered.

"Yeah," Kling said. "We'd better call the night D.A. right away, get him to take a full confession from her."

"Killed four of them without batting an eyelash," O'Brien said, and shook his head, and went back to where the stenographer was typing up Mrs. Martin's statement.

The telephone was ringing. Kling walked to the nearest desk and lifted the receiver. "Eighty-seventh, Detective Kling," he said.

"This is Donner."

"Yeah, Fats."

"I think I got a lead on one of those heaps."

"Shoot."

"This would be the one heisted on Fourteenth Street. According to the dope I've got it happened yesterday morning. Does that check out?"

"I'll have to look at the bulletin again. Go ahead, Fats."

"It's already been ditched," Donner said. "If you're looking for it try outside the electric company on the River Road."

"Thanks, I'll make a note of that. Who stole it, Fats?"

"This is strictly *entre nous*," Donner said. "I don't want *no* tie-in with it *never*. The guy who done it is a mean little guy—rip out his mother's heart for a dime. He hates blacks, killed one in a street rumble a few years ago, and managed to beat the rap. I think maybe some officer was on the take, huh, Kling?"

"You can't square homicide in this city, and you know it, Fats."

"Yeah? I'm surprised. You can square damn near anything else for a couple of bills."

"What's his name?"

"Danny Ryder. Three-five-four-one Grover Avenue. You won't find him there now, though."

"Where *will* I find him now?"

"Ten minutes ago he was in an all-night bar on Mason, place called Felicia's. You going in after him?"

"I am."

"Take your gun," Donner said.

There were seven people in Felicia's when Kling got there at 4:45. He cased the bar through the plate-glass window fronting the place, unbuttoned the third button of his overcoat, reached in to clutch the butt of his revolver, worked it out of the holster once and then back again, and went in through the front door.

There was the immediate smell of stale cigarette smoke and beer and sweat and cheap perfume. A Puerto Rican girl was in

whispered consultation with a sailor in one of the leatherette-lined booths. Another sailor was hunched over the juke box, thoughtfully considering his next selection, his face tinted orange and red and green from the colored tubing. A tired, fat, 50-year old blonde sat at the far end of the bar, watching the sailor as though the next button he pushed might destroy the entire world. The bartender was polishing glasses. He looked up when Kling walked in and immediately smelled the law.

Two men were seated at the opposite end of the bar.

One of them was wearing a blue turtleneck sweater, gray slacks, and desert boots. His brown hair was clipped close to his scalp in a military cut. The other man was wearing a bright orange team jacket, almost luminous, with the words *Orioles, S.A.C.* lettered across its back. The one with the crewcut said something softly, and the other one chuckled. Behind the bar a glass clinked as the bartender replaced it on the shelf. The juke box erupted in sound, Jimi Hendrix rendering *All Along the Watchtower*.

Kling walked over to the two men.

"Which one of you is Danny Ryder?" he asked.

The one with the short hair said, "Who wants to know?"

"Police officer," Kling said, and the one in the orange jacket whirled with a pistol in his hand. Kling's eyes opened wide in surprise, and the pistol went off.

There was no time to think, there was hardly time to breathe. The explosion of the pistol was shockingly close, the acrid stink of cordite was in Kling's nostrils. The knowledge that he was still alive, the sweet rushing clean awareness that the bullet had somehow missed him was only a fleeting click of intelligence accompanying what was essentially a reflexive act.

Kling's .38 came free of its holster, his finger was inside the trigger guard and around the trigger, he squeezed off his shot almost before the gun had cleared the flap of his overcoat, fired into the orange jacket and threw his shoulder simultaneously against the chest of the man with the short hair, knocking him backward off his stool. The man in the orange jacket, his face twisted in pain, was leveling the pistol for another shot.

Kling fired again, squeezing the trigger without thought of rancor, and then whirled on the man with the short hair, who was crouched on the floor against the bar.

"Get up!"

"Don't shoot!"

"Get up!"

He yanked the man to his feet, hurled him against the bar, thrust the muzzle of his pistol at the blue turtleneck sweater, ran his hands under the armpits and between the legs, while the man kept saying over and over again. "Don't shoot, please don't shoot."

He backed away from him and leaned over the one in the orange jacket.

"Is this Ryder?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Who're you?"

"Frank Pasquale. Look, I—"

"Shut up, Frank," Kling said. "Put your hands behind your back. Move!"

He had already taken his handcuffs from his belt. He snapped them onto Pasquale's wrists, and only then became aware that Jimi Hendrix was still singing, the sailors were watching with pale white faces, the Puerto Rican girl was screaming, the fat faded blonde had her mouth open, the bartender was frozen in midmotion, the tip of his bar towel inside a glass.

"All right," Kling said. He was breathing harshly. "All right," he said again, and wiped his forehead.

Timothy Allen Ames was a potbellied man of 40, with a thick black mustache, a mane of long black hair, and brown eyes sharply alert at 5:05 in the morning. He answered the door as though he'd been already awake, asked for identification, then asked the detectives to wait a moment, closed the door, and came back shortly afterward, wearing a robe over his striped pajamas.

"Is your name Timothy Ames?" Carella asked.

"That's me," Ames said. "Little late to be paying a visit, ain't it?"

"Or early, depending how you look at it," Hawes said.

"One thing I can do without at five A.M. is humorous cops," Ames said. "How'd you get up here, anyway? Is that little jerk asleep at the desk again?"

"Who do you mean?" Carella asked.

"Lonnie Sanford, or whatever his name is."

"Ronald—Ronnie Sanford."

"Yeah, him. Always giving me trouble."

"What kind of trouble?"

"About broads," Ames said. "Acts like he's running a nunnery here, can't stand to see a guy come in with a girl. I notice he ain't got no compunctions about letting *cops* upstairs, though, no matter *what* time it is."

"Never mind Sanford, let's talk about you," Carella said.

"Sure, what would you like to know?"

"Where were you between eleven-twenty and twelve tonight?"

"Right here."

"Can you prove it?"

"Sure. I got back here about eleven o'clock, and I been here ever since. Ask Sanford downstairs—no, he wasn't on yet. He don't come on till midnight."

"Who else can we ask, Ames?"

"Listen, you going to make trouble for me?"

"Only if you're in trouble."

"I got a broad here. She's over eighteen, don't worry. But, like, she's a junkie, you know? But I know you guys, and if you want to make trouble—"

"Where is she?"

"In the john."

"Get her out here."

"Look, do me a favor, will you? Don't bust the kid. She's trying to kick the habit, she really is. I been helping her along."

"How?"

"By keeping her busy," Ames said, and winked.

"Call her."

"Bea, come out here!" Ames shouted.

There were a few moments of hesitation, then the bathroom door opened. The girl was a tall plain brunette wearing a short terrycloth robe. She sidled into the room cautiously, as though expecting to be struck in the face at any moment. Her brown eyes were wide with expectancy. She knew fuzz, she knew what it was like to be arrested on a narcotics charge, and she had listened to the conversation from behind the closed bathroom door; and now she waited for whatever was coming, expecting the worst.

"What's your name, Miss?" Hawes asked.

"Beatrice Norden."

"What time did you get here tonight, Beatrice?"

"About eleven."

"Was this man with you?"

"Yes."

"Did he leave here at any time tonight?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"I'm positive. He picked me up about nine o'clock—"

"Where do you live, Beatrice?"

"Well, that's the thing, you see," the girl said. "I been put out of my room."

"So where'd he pick you up?"

"At my girl friend's house. You can ask her, she was there when he came. Her name is Rosalie Dawes. Anyway, Timmy picked me up at nine, and we went out to eat, and we came up here around eleven."

"I hope you're telling us the truth, Miss Norden," Carella said.

"I swear to God, we been here all night," Beatrice answered.

"All right, Ames," Hawes said, "we'd like a sample of your handwriting."

"My what?"

"Your handwriting."

"What for?"

"We collect autographs," Carella said.

"Gee, these guys really break me up," Ames said to the girl. "Regular night-club comics we get in the middle of the night."

Carella handed him a pencil and then tore a sheet from his pad, "You want to write this for me?" he said. "The first part's in block lettering."

"What the hell is block lettering?" Ames asked.

"He means *print* it," Hawes said.

"Then why didn't he say so?"

"Put on your clothes, Miss," Carella said.

"What for?" Beatrice said.

"That's what I want him to write," Carella explained.

"Oh."

"Put on your clothes, Miss," Ames repeated, and lettered it onto the sheet of paper. "What else?" he asked, looking up.

"Now sign it in your own handwriting with the following words: The Avenging Angel."

"What the hell is this supposed to be?" Ames asked.

"You want to write it, please?"

Ames wrote the words, then handed the slip of paper to Carella. He and Hawes compared it with the note that had been mailed to Mercy Howell:

*PUT ON YOUR CLOTHES,
MISS.*

The Avenging Angel

*PUT ON YOUR
CLOSE, Miss!*

The Avenging Angel.

"So?" Ames asked.

"So you're clean," Hawes said.

At the desk downstairs, Ronnie Sanford was still immersed in his accounting textbook. He got to his feet again as the detectives came out of the elevator, adjusted his glasses on his nose, and said, "Any luck?"

"Afraid not," Carella answered. "We're going to need this register for a while, if that's okay."

"Well—"

"Give him a receipt for it, Cotton," Carella said. It was late, and he didn't want a debate in the lobby of a rundown hotel. Hawes quickly made out a receipt in duplicate, signed both copies, and handed one to Sanford.

"What about this torn cover?" Hawes asked belatedly.

"Yeah," Carella said. There was a small rip on the leather binding of the book. He fingered it briefly now, then said, "Better note that on the receipt, Cotton." Hawes took back the receipt and, on both copies, jotted the words "Small rip on front cover." He handed the receipts back to Sanford.

"Want to just sign these, Mr. Sanford?" he said.

"What for?" Sanford asked.

"To indicate we received the register in this condition."

"Oh, sure," Sanford said. He picked up a ballpoint pen from its desk holder, and asked, "What do you want me to write?"

"Your name and your title, that's all."

"My title?"

"Night Clerk, The Addison Hotel."

"Oh, sure," Sanford said, and signed both receipts. "This okay?" he asked. The detectives looked at what he had written.

"You like girls?" Carella asked suddenly.

"What?" Sanford asked.

"Girls," Hawes said.

"Sure. Sure, I like girls."

"Dressed or naked?"

"I—I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Where were you tonight between eleven twenty and midnight?" Hawes asked.

"Getting—getting ready to come to—to work," Sanford said.

"You sure you weren't in the alley of the Eleventh Street Theater stabbing a girl named Mercy Howell?"

"What? No—no, of course not. I was—I was home—getting dressed—" Sanford took a deep breath and decided to get indignant. "Listen, what's this all about?" he said.

"It's all about this," Carella said, and turned one of the receipts so that Sanford could read the signature:

*Ronald Sanford
Night Clerk
The Addison Hotel*

"Get your hat," Hawes said. "Study hall's over."

It was 5:25 when Adele Gorman came into the room with Meyer's cup of tea. He was crouched near the air-conditioning unit recessed into the wall to the left of the drapes; he glanced up when he heard her, then rose.

"I didn't know what you took," she said, "so I brought everything."

"Thank you," he said. "Just a little sugar is fine."

"Have you measured the room?" she asked, and put the tray down on the table in front of the sofa.

"Yes, I think I have everything I need now," Meyer said. He put a spoonful of sugar into the tea, stirred it, then lifted the cup to his mouth. "Hot," he said.

Adele Gorman was watching him silently. She said nothing. He

kept sipping his tea. The ornate clock on the mantelpiece ticked in a swift whispering tempo.

"Do you always keep this room so dim?" Meyer asked.

"Well, my husband is blind, you know," Adele said. "There's really no need for brighter light."

"Mmm. But your father reads in this room, doesn't he?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"The night you came home from that party. He was sitting in the chair over there near the floor lamp. Reading. Remember?"

"Oh. Yes, he was."

"Bad light to read by."

"Yes, I suppose it is."

"I think maybe those bulbs are defective," Meyer said.

"Do you think so?"

"Mmm. I happened to look at the lamp, and there are three one-hundred-watt bulbs in it, all of them burning. You should be getting a lot more light with that much wattage."

"Well, I really don't know about such—"

"Unless the lamp is on a rheostat, of course."

"I'm afraid I don't even know what a rheostat is."

"It's an adjustable resistor. You can dim your lights or make them brighter with it. I thought maybe the lamp was on a rheostat, but I couldn't find a control knob anywhere in the room." Meyer paused. "You wouldn't know if there's a rheostat control in the house, would you?"

"I'm sure there isn't," Adele said.

"Must be defective bulbs then," Meyer said, and smiled. "Also, I think your air conditioner is broken."

"No, I'm sure it isn't."

"Well, I was just looking at it, and all the switches are turned to the 'On' position, but it isn't working. So I guess it's broken. That's a shame, too, because it's such a nice unit. Sixteen thousand BTUs. That's a lot of cooling power for a room this size. We've got one of those big old price-fixed apartments on Concord, my wife and I, with a large bedroom, and we get adequate cooling from a half-ton unit. It's a shame this one is broken."

"Yes. Detective Meyer, I don't wish to appear rude, but if it is late—"

"Sure," Meyer said. "Unless, of course, the air conditioner's on a remote switch, too. So that all you have to do is turn a knob in

another part of the house and it comes on." He paused. "Is there such a switch somewhere, Mrs. Gorman?"

"I have no idea."

"I'll just finish my tea and run along," Meyer said. He lifted the cup to his lips, sipped the tea, glanced at her over the rim, took the cup away from his mouth, and said, "But I'll be back."

"I hardly think there's any need for that," Adele said.

"Well, some jewelry's been stolen—"

"The ghosts—"

"Come off it, Mrs. Gorman."

The room went silent.

"Where are the loudspeakers, Mrs. Gorman?" Meyer asked. "In the false beams up there? They're hollow—I checked them out."

"I think perhaps you'd better leave," Adele said slowly.

"Sure," Meyer said. He put the cup down, and got to his feet.

"I'll show you out," Adele said.

They walked to the front door and out into the driveway. The night was still. The drizzle had stopped, and a thin layer of frost covered the grass rolling away toward the river. Their footsteps crunched on the gravel as they walked toward the automobile.

"My husband was blinded four years ago," Adele said abruptly. "He's a chemical engineer, there was an explosion at the plant, he could have been killed. Instead, he was only blinded." She hesitated an instant, then said again, "Only blinded," and there was such a sudden cry of despair in those two words that Meyer wanted to put his arm around her, console her the way he might his daughter, tell her that everything would be all right come morning.

But instead he leaned on the fender of his car, and she stood beside him looking down at the driveway gravel, her eyes not meeting his. They could have been conspirators exchanging secrets in the night, but they were only two people who had been thrown together on a premise as flimsy as the ghosts that inhabited this house.

"He gets a disability pension from the company," Adele said, "they've really been quite kind to us. And, of course, I work. I teach school, Detective Meyer. Kindergarten. I love children." She paused. She would not raise her eyes to meet his. "But—it's sometimes very difficult. My father, you see—"

Meyer waited. He longed suddenly for dawn, but he waited patiently, and heard her catch her breath as though committed to go

ahead now however painful the revelation might be, compelled to throw herself on the mercy of the night before the morning sun broke through.

"My father's been retired for fifteen years. He gambles, Detective Meyer. He's a horse player. He loses large sums of money."

"Is that why he stole your jewels?" Meyer asked.

"You know, don't you?" Adele said simply, and raised her eyes to his. "Of course you know. It's quite transparent, his ruse, a shoddy little show really, a performance that would fool no one but—no one but a blind man." She brushed at her cheek; he could not tell whether the cold air had caused her sudden tears. "I really don't care about the theft; the jewels were left to me by my mother, and after all it was my father who bought them for her, so it's—it's really like returning a legacy. I really don't care about that part of it. I'd have *given* the jewelry to him if only he'd asked, but he's such a proud man. A proud man who steals from me and pretends that ghosts are committing the crime.

"And my husband, in his dark universe, listens to the sounds my father puts on tape and visualizes things he cannot quite believe and so he asks me to notify the police because he needs an impartial observer to contradict the suspicion that someone is stealing pennies from his blind man's cup. That's why I came to you, Detective Meyer. So that you would arrive here tonight and perhaps be fooled as I was fooled at first, and perhaps say to my husband, 'Yes, Mr. Gorman, there *are* ghosts in your house.'"

She suddenly placed her hand on his sleeve. The tears were streaming down her face, she had difficulty catching her breath. "Because you see, Detective Meyer, there *are* ghosts in this house, there really and truly are. The ghost of a proud man who was once a brilliant judge and who is now a gambler and a thief; and the ghost of a man who once could see, and who now trips and falls in the darkness."

On the river a tugboat hooted. Adele Gorman fell silent. Meyer opened the door of his car and got in behind the wheel.

"I'll call your husband tomorrow," he said gruffly. "Tell him I'm convinced something supernatural is happening here."

"And will you be back, Detective Meyer?"

"No," he said. "I won't be back, Mrs. Gorman."

In the squadroom they were wrapping up the night. Their day had begun at 7:45 P.M. yesterday, and they had been officially re-

lieved at 5:45 A.M.; but they had not left the office yet because there were questions still to be asked, reports to be typed, odds and ends to be put in place before they could go home. And since the relieving detectives were busy getting *their* approaching workday organized, the squadroom at 6:00 A.M. was busier than it might have been on any given afternoon, with two teams of cops getting in each others' way.

In the Interrogation Room, Carella and Hawes were questioning young Ronald Sanford in the presence of the Assistant District Attorney who had come over earlier to take Mrs. Martin's confession, and who now found himself listening to another one when all he wanted to do was go home to sleep. Sanford seemed terribly shocked that they had been able to notice the identical handwriting in *The Addison Hotel* and *The Avenging Angel*—he couldn't get over it. He thought he had been very clever in misspelling the word "clothes," because then they'd think an illiterate had written it, not someone studying to be an accountant.

He could not explain why he had killed Mercy Howell. He got all mixed up when he tried to explain that. It had something to do with the moral climate of America, and people exposing themselves in public, people like that shouldn't be allowed to pollute others, to foist their filth on others, to intrude on the privacy of others who were trying so very hard to make something of themselves, studying accounting by day and working in a hotel by night, what right had these people to ruin it for everybody else?

Frank Pasquale's tune, sung in the Clerical Office to Kling and O'Brien, was not quite so hysterical, but similar to Sanford's nonetheless. He had got the idea together with Danny Ryder. They had decided between them that the blacks in America were taking jobs away from decent hardworking people who only wanted to be left alone, what right did they have to force themselves on everybody else? So they had decided to bomb the church, just to show them they couldn't get away with it, not in America. He didn't seem terribly concerned over the fact that his partner was lying stone-cold dead on a slab at the morgue, or that their little Culver Avenue expedition had cost three people their lives, and had severely injured a half dozen others. All he wanted to know, repeatedly, was whether his picture would be in the paper.

At his desk Meyer Meyer started to type up a report on the Gorman ghosts, then decided the hell with it. If the lieutenant asked him where he'd been half the night, he would say he had

been out looking for trouble in the streets. The Lord knew there was enough of *that* around, any night. He pulled the report forms and their separating sheets of carbon paper from the ancient typewriter, and noticed that Detective Hal Willis was pacing the room, waiting to get at the desk the moment he vacated it.

"Okay, Hal," he said, "it's all yours."

"Finalmente!" Willis, who was not Italian, said.

The telephone rang.

The sun was up when they came out of the building and walked past the hanging green "87" globes and down the low flat steps to the sidewalk. The park across the street shimmered with early-morning autumn brilliance, the sky above it was clear and blue.

They walked toward the diner on the next block, Meyer and O'Brien ahead of the others, Carella, Hawes, and Kling bringing up the rear. They were tired, and exhaustion showed in their eyes, in the set of their mouths, in the pace they kept. They talked without animation, mostly about their work, their breaths feathery and white on the cold morning air.

When they reached the diner, they took off their overcoats and ordered hot coffee and cheese Danish and toasted English muffins. Meyer said he thought he was coming down with a cold. Carella told him about some cough medicine his wife had given one of the children. O'Brien, munching on a muffin, glanced across the diner and saw a young girl in one of the booths. She was wearing blue jeans and a bright colored Mexican serape, and she was talking to a boy wearing a Navy pea jacket.

"I think I see somebody," he said, and he moved out of the booth past Kling and Hawes, who were talking about the newest regulation on search and seizure.

The girl looked up when he approached the booth.

"Miss Blair?" he said. "Penelope Blair?"

"Yes," the girl answered. "Who are you?"

"Detective O'Brien," he said, "Eighty-seventh Precinct. Your mother was in last night, Penny. She asked me to tell you—"

"Flake off, cop," Penelope Blair said. "Go stop a riot somewhere."

O'Brien looked at her silently for a moment. Then he nodded, turned away, and went back to the table.

"Anything?" Kling asked.

"You can't win 'em all," O'Brien said.

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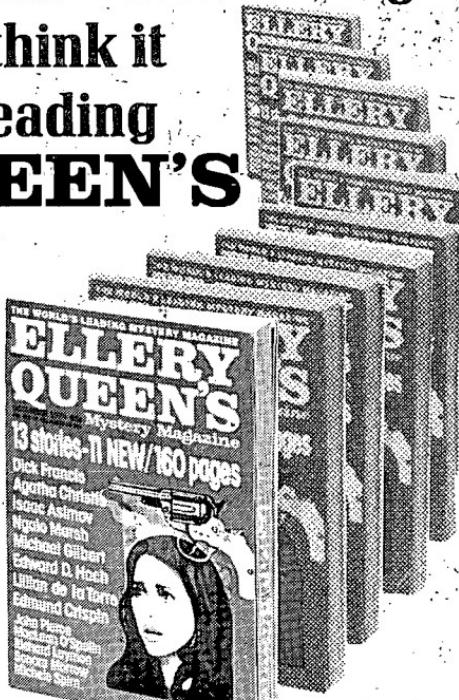
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